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Indian Today

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INDIA TODAY

JANUARY 15, 1984

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1983: HIGH DRAMA & DEEP DESPAIR

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THE COMPLETE NEWSMAGAZINE

VOLUME IX NUMBER 1
FOR THE FORTNIGHT JANUARY 1-15, 1984

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EIGHT YEARS AGO, INDIA TODAY started modestly in a small corridor office with a print order of 5,000, an editorial staff of four and a total strength of 11. The office lacked space to conduct editorial conferences and the staff would move next door to a restaurant and talk about upcoming issues and ongoing assignments over cups of tea and coffee. Today, the premises are a lot bigger and there is a conference room in which to meet. But change and growth is reflected in other facts: INDIA TODAY now has a print order of 2,70,000, an editorial staff of 40 and a total strength of 120. And nothing brings home the nature of this growth better than thumbing through the pages of the earlier issues which seem to belong, in their tentative, experimental nature, to a bygone era.

To some extent this is understandable. There is, after all, no school as demanding as the school of experience, and these intervening eight years have been among the most momentous in the life of this country. The period encompassed the country's first (and hopefully last) Emergency, the first non-Congress government at a national level, elections sweeping regimes into the dustbin, the clash of personalities on an unprecedented scale, the rise of Sanjay Gandhi and his sudden departure from the scene, the emergence of regional leaders like N. T. Rama Rao, Farooq Abdullah and R. K. Hegde, the ouster of men like A. R. Antulay for his misdeeds and the shake-up of the polity of the country. It also saw the coming of spectacular extravaganzas, Asiad, the NAM and CHOGM summits. It has been a period when social tensions have erupted with greater violence and anger than in the past, culminating in the carnage in Assam and the three-year-long violent drama in Punjab.

Reporting and understanding these events and trends has never been easy, certainly not for a magazine just getting off the ground. But it has been a spirited effort, keeping pace with fast moving events, keeping tabs on diverse and often whimsical personalities, interpreting them every fortnight, keeping, at the same time, the freshness of news.

And, if there has been a measure of success in its efforts, it has been hard won, with painstaking effort. Editing a magazine is very much like conducting an orchestra. But it is more than interpreting the score, keeping the tempo and making sure of entrances and exits of the various musicians. Magazine production calls for as much of a range of skills as there are instruments in an orchestra but they are often uneven in their levels of accomplishments, and the news never comes neatly scripted like a musical score. Over the years, this has called for more and more specialisation, more editors, more reporters, more photographers, more sub-editors, more production staff, a large design team. That effort will in essence, never stop as the magazine sharpens its efforts to tell the news as it is, holding up a mirror to society.

All of this suggests that more than anything else, INDIA TODAY is the product of teamwork. Publications tend often to be identified with individuals. Not so INDIA TODAY where the finished product is a cooperative venture which has the contribution of large numbers of people, whether in the writing or the visual look of the product, its printing quality or its total personality.

IN A SIGNIFICANT way, the cover story in this issue reflects this. It is probably the most ambitious cooperative story that the magazine has ever attempted. The idea was conceived and discussed in Delhi before an editorial brief was circulated to virtually all the magazine's outstation correspondents. Several of them then planned visits to different parts of their states to diversify the scope of their work.

The design and production department went to work to provide a different look for a story which runs counter to INDIA TODAY's usual cover stories. It seemed an appropriate time to go out and listen to the voice of India's children, the voice of tomorrow's generation who will one day pass judgement on the deeds of today's generation. It also seemed symbolic of the constant effort at the magazine to strive for new standards and new horizons, keeping the perspective of youth and innovation even with the passing of years.

INDIA TODAY wishes all its readers a very happy new year.



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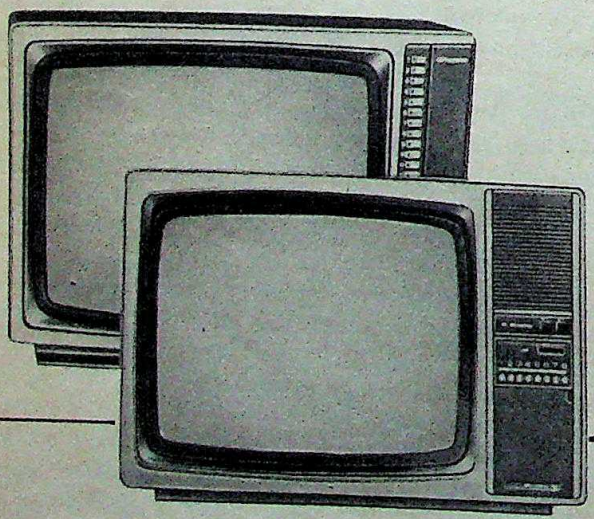
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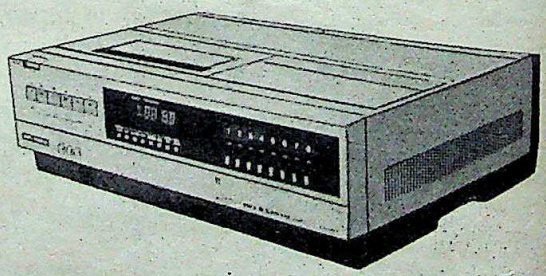
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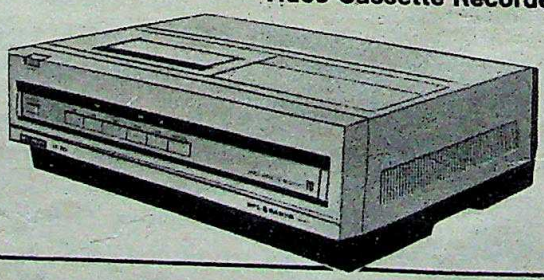
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8 **Comment**
9 **Year in Review**
1983: High Drama & Dark Despair
18 **Eye-catchers 1983**
Cover Story
20 Children: Speaking Out
The Economy
37 Review: Vicious Paradoxes
Opinion Poll
42 INDIA TODAY-MARG BAROMETER: Political Pointers
Perspective
46 1984: The Future is Now
Current Events
48 By-elections: Qualified Success
50 Assam: Changing Strategy
52 Congress(I): The Threat Within
57 New Zealand: Diplomatic Imbroglio
58 Maharashtra: Battle for Bahubali
59 Madhya Pradesh: High Hopes
61 West Bengal: Miscalculation
62 Orissa: Trying Times
63 Punjab: Violent Ways
64 Maharashtra: Naxalite Influx
Crime
69 Bangalore: Improvident Funds
Media
72 Punjab: Writing Under Threat
Religion
76 Varanasi: Grave Problems
Environment
85 Bombay: Power Struggle
Letter From Paris
86 Arms Sales: Laissez Fire
Globe-trotting
91 United Kingdom: The Indian Trend
Neighbours
97 Bangladesh: Cat and Mouse Game
Special Feature
104 Medak: Broken Promises
Investigation
110 Kerala: Skeletons in the Cabinet
119 **Trade Winds**
Business
122 Abdul Wahab Galadari: Falling from Grace
129 Reliance: The Investment Maze
133 Retailing: Boycott Power
137 NDDB: A Flood of Criticism
141 Markets: Buzzing Along
Books
144 Changing Times
Sports
153 Cricket: Failing the Tests
160 **Eye-catchers**

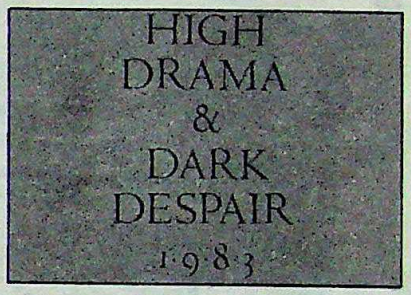
Cover Photographs by RAGHU RAI & BHAWAN SINGH



Children

India's 260 million children, more than half of whom live in the countryside, are tomorrow's generation in the making, the country's farmers and workers, its leaders, industrialists, intellectuals and its masses. What do India's children think of their country, themselves and their future? It is a question only the children themselves can answer.

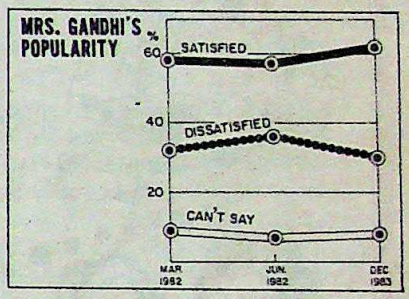
Cover Story • Page 20



Year in Review

It proved to be a year of paradoxes. Pitted against the star-studded and extravagant background of NAM and CHOGM was the continuing turmoil in Punjab and the carnage in Assam. Superstars like N.T. Rama Rao, Farooq Abdullah and Maneka Gandhi emerged on the political scene. There were storms and scandals concerning high-profile individuals: Swraj Paul and Swami Dhirendra Brahmachari.

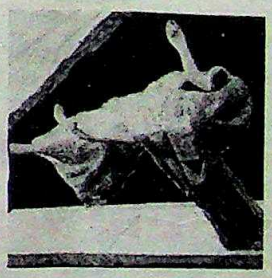
• **Page 9**



Opinion Poll

Continuing our series of opinion polls, the last of which was held in June 1982, the December INDIA TODAY-MARG poll covered 14 cities and interviewed a total of 5,715 electors. Opinions were sought on diverse and crucial issues, from Mrs Gandhi's popularity, law and order, the Assam and Punjab imbroglios to the state of the economy and electoral popularity.

• **Page 42**



United Kingdom

In Britain, 1983 appears to have been the year of India. Not only through heating up the dusty left-overs of the Raj at the box-office but also through a commercial follow-up of last year's Festival of India. The Indian influence coloured every facet of British life—in fashion, art, decor and television.

Globe-trotting • Page 91



Kerala

Kerala Chief Minister K. Karunakaran was the target of a scathing opposition attack last fortnight, for his association with two businessmen—K.N. Damodar Menon and Nanu Ezhuthassan. The results showed when Karunakaran survived with a reduced majority after the vote on a no-confidence motion.

Investigation • Page 110



Reliance

Last fortnight the Reliance non-resident investors riddle was beginning finally to unravel. Shareholders who together had pumped in an astonishing Rs 22.5 crore turned out to be relatively small businessmen based in Leicester, New York, West Berlin and Djibouti, many of them members of one Shah family.

Business • Page 129

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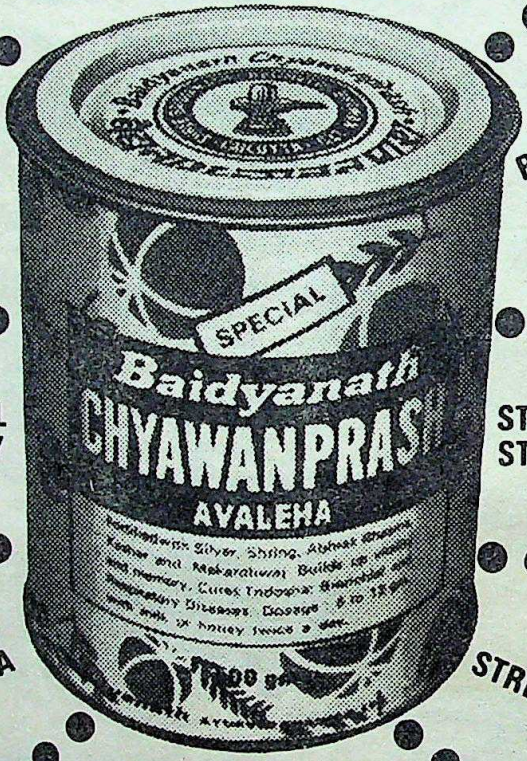
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THE ESPIONAGE GAME

I read with interest the spine-chilling true thriller, The Spy Trade (cover story, December 31). But I have a nagging question to ask: Since when have our sleeping Intelligence Bureau (IB) sleuths become so smart and active? My suspicion is that KGB men suddenly found one of their contacts in the suspicion list. To avert any possible mishap, they played an old game. They fed the IB indirectly about the involvement of the Larkins brothers and others with the CIA in espionage. Attention was diverted; the KGB men had their contacts saved. This is a very simple game. Both KGB and CIA are penetrating into our vital defence sector. A few years from now, the CIA will tip off the IB to get caught a KGB contact man!

Patna *Shishir Kumar*

■ Your fascinating cover story makes 007 sound like a big fake. It is shocking to know how deeply this rotten spy business has eaten away into the nation's power structure. If top-ranking officers of the defence wings can indulge in this kind of espionage, can the other responsible leaders, diplomats, officers and underpaid underdogs be really trusted not to sell out the country politically and strategically to alien intelligence agencies? The Government must catch such traitors and give them exemplary punishment.

Bombay *Quaid Z. Najmi*

■ A frustrated intelligence organisation cannot deliver the goods for any country. Better working conditions and lesser political interference will make the intelligence agencies more effective.

Madras *V.N. Narayanaswamy*

■ We are spending phenomenal amounts of money for the country's defence. But is India really safe in the hands of the defence personnel? There should be some restrictions on retired service officers seeking consultancy assignments and establishing contacts with foreign firms.

New Delhi *Ram Kumar*

■ Spying by foreign agencies in India is an open secret. But what is disturbing is the involvement of defence personnel in it. The number of people involved may be small. But it has certainly tarnished the lily-white image of our defence forces, and shaken the people's trust in them.

Kansur-Sirsi (Karnataka) *Dr G.N. Sharma*

■ The culprits of the latest spy ring should be subjected to an open trial and awarded exemplary punishment. Had this been done in the Samba Spying Case, the Larkins episode might not have occurred at all. The Government must now reorganise its intelligence agencies without further delay.

Lucknow *Dhiresh Bahadur*

■ Maybe army officers should not be given all those facilities they enjoy during their service. They do not hesitate to stoop so low as to sell the interests of their country in order to maintain a life-style that they used to while in service. Alternately, they should be given good jobs with perks after retirement too.

Udhampur (J&K) *Kuldip Singh*

■ In a nation where corruption is rampant, where politicians tell lies as a rule rather than as an exception, what harm can a handful of spies do? They are only disproving the saying that "Only God can rule this nation of chaos." It seems that it is not God but Satan who has taken over now.

Delhi *Ira Sethi*

LOW TACTICS

General Sinha's story (December 31) is a sad reflection of the Indian decision-making system, which is highly subjective even on sensitive issues like the appointment of the chief of the army staff. To talk of ethics and expecting high morals from the army under the circumstances would only be day-dreaming. It should surprise no one if, in future, generals also behave like opportunistic administrative officers, learn the art of conceit from politicians and use them in espionage activities. Perhaps the Indian Government deserves to be congratulated on hastening the process of disintegration of defence services which have anyway begun producing unsavoury characters like the Larkins brothers.

New Delhi *Yogendra Tripathi*

■ The movements and promotions of senior defence officers are supposed to be confidential. If the daughters of the respective generals knew who would be the next chief of the army staff and subsequently made trans-Atlantic phone calls, why then are we blaming the Larkinses?

Secunderabad *Ramesh Mocherla*

OFF CUE

Michael Fereira ("Champion of the Cue", December 31) is right in saying that in India sports means cricket, not just to the general public and politicians but to journalists as well. You had put the Prudential Cup winners on the cover, but why not Fereira who made history by winning the World Amateur Billiards title for the third time in six years?

Bangalore *P.S. Raja Ramalingam*

OUT OF FORM

People say that Gavaskar is now enjoying his batting because he is no more under pressure to score (December 31). But playing without pressure does not mean for an opening batsman to start hooking and pulling right from the word go and returning to the pavilion without registering even the lowest double figure against his name! If this be the case, I would like him to play under pressure and score only 40 or 50 runs in an innings for a few years more.

Patna *Kumar Anand*

■ Our cricketers should not be paid Rs 15,500 per Test match, but on the basis of their individual performances thus: Rs 100 for each run scored; Rs 1,000 for each wicket taken; Rs 500 for every catch; Rs 500 for every throw that results in a run-out; and Rs 1,000 for stumping. Now we pay about Rs 2,30,000 to 14 cricketers per Test match. If my suggestion is followed, we will have to pay Rs 80,000 even if we score 400 runs per innings. Bowlers will get Rs 20,000 for their efforts in two innings. Thus, the Cricket Board will save at least Rs 50,000 per Test.

Bombay *Janki Dass*

■ It was a mistake on the part of the selection committee to have dropped Gavaskar as captain. Only a jolt was necessary to awaken him by depriving him of the captaincy for a series or two, not the sledge-hammer blow which completely demoralised him. Gavaskar may be "enjoying" cricket while taking wild sweeps outside the off-stump, but with what results? Would he have done this if he had been the captain? Imagine a general in the army saying he's tired of defending the country and that it's time he enjoyed himself by having a few crack shots at the enemy? What a fine lad Kapil Dev was, doing so well in all the departments of the game until his elevation! The selection committee must take the blame for destroying him as a batsman. He's still too young to carry the burden of captaincy, which must immediately be reverted to Gavaskar.

New Delhi *Dr R.D. Girdhar*

CHANGING TIMES

It is sad that the Ramakrishna Hegde affair has the blessings of Indira Gandhi

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ADWAVE 249

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("Back to the Wall", December 15). Gone are those days when it was a privilege to be called a Congressman. The khadi-clad worker was then a sign of honesty, integrity and dedicated service to the nation. Now the party consists of disgruntled elements who just want to remain in power for personal benefits.

Srinagar *Shoukat A. Malik*

ARMS AND THE SWAMI

Let us sincerely hope that truth will ultimately prevail through the courts of law over the tact, intelligence and influence of Dhirendra Brahmachari ("Summons for the Swami", December 31). If more politicians and ministers are involved in this scandal, they should be brought to book.

Madras *K.V. Rajagopalan*

■ Dhirendra Brahmachari is definitely a wolf in sheep's clothing ("Gunning for the Swami", December 15). Unravelling the story of his arms factory is commendable and the strong action taken by the chief minister is also admirable.

But how will Farooq account for using Brahmachari's aircraft?

Shillong *Dilip Kumar Singh*

■ No anti-national elements should be allowed to thrive in the shadow of political bigs. Dr Farooq Abdullah has done the right thing by initiating action against the flying swami.

Srinagar *Mushtaq A. Bhat*

ROYAL RAGTIME

Your correspondent has done a good job by adding interesting titbits in the mundane routine of the Queen's visit ("The Royal Roundabout," December 15). 'The Queen' for the English people is an institution they understand, but for us she is just an institution maintained at great cost by England, a rubber stamp which the Maggies of England use whenever and however they want, and an institutional personality still kept alive as a symbol of colonial rule. The only point the Government made by spending Rs 12 lakh on the Rashtrapati Nilayam for the Queen's stay, was that the British rubber stamp in India is more valuable than the Indian rubber stamp in India.

Mysore *G. Kamal*

■ The article on the Queen might have caused twitters all around but it was shocking that an otherwise polished critic should descend to the level of such petty-mindedness. With that one article, you have joined the league of all those dozens of rags which spew vulgarity for vulgarity's sake. What next?

Delhi *Sandeep Khanna*

PROMOTING DISSENT

The infighting within the Congress(I) in West Bengal ("Jostling for Place", December 15) indicates that the high command has a genius for promoting dissent.

In view of this one wonders about the validity of the new Congress(I) slogan—Integrity, Stability and Growth—when integrity lies in shambles in Karnataka in the Moily tape case, stability now relates to stables for horse-trading in politics and growth pertains to rising lawlessness and chaos.

Calcutta *P.K. Sahoo*

UNYIELDING CLUB

It is amazing that your writer is so optimistic about the outcome of the Commonwealth meet ("A Clubby Conclave", December 15). In fact club talks have never yielded any results. The League of Nations was unable to prevent the Second World War and nor is the United Nations Organisation strong enough to force its will (the decision of the majority) on any of the superpowers or their allies. So how can we expect the Commonwealth to create any effect whatsoever on the international scene.

Calcutta *Nirendra Nagar*

BANKING FIASCO

Your brilliant exposé ("Frauds and Failings", December 15) is no surprise to those who are employed in nationalised banks. Thanks to nationalisation of 14 major Indian banks in 1969 and some more later on, these one-time prestigious institutions are today in a mess. These banks are now nobody's baby. Mismanagement is conspicuous. Under the circumstances "rectitude" is the first casualty leading to untold mischief and causing chaotic conditions in the internal working which is in shambles. The statistics you have gathered are truly mind-boggling and yet these are only the tip of the iceberg. It was a folly to nationalise banks. Nationalisation was more a political stunt than an economic necessity.

Calcutta *T.K. Katrak*

MISTAKEN CRITIC

There is a reference to an advocate called S.N. Medhi in your report on Assam, entitled "Violent Reminders" (December 15). It pertained to a statement by former Assam chief minister Sarat Sinha. There is only one advocate with this name and that is me. Sarat Sinha was actually referring to Suren Medhi, who is not an advocate but a lecturer in a local college. It was he who had criticised some of the activities of the leaders of the Assam movement in a letter in an Assamese daily. I have nothing to do with this.

Gauhati *S.N. Medhi*

SKIN TRADE

I was pained to read about the smuggling of rare animals' skins in Jammu & Kashmir (November 15). I suggest that Mir Inaytullah join his enterprising tribe of skin traders rather than being a helpless chief wildlife warden in the state.

New Delhi *S.C. Aggarwal*

■ No special exemption has been granted to any state by the Union Government regarding export of skins from India. It is not true that after India became a party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), export of skins was banned with the exception of Jammu & Kashmir. Section 47 of the J&K Wildlife (Protection) Act 1978 empowers the chief wildlife warden of the state to deal with animals and animal products brought inside the state from other places. The Union Government issues no legal procurement certificates; the state Government does. The Wildlife Department of the state is competent to take legal action.

New Delhi *S.K. Mukherjee*
deputy director, Wildlife Preservation
Department of Environment

NOT INVOLVED

It is not true that the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago was one of the countries that supposedly invited the United States to intervene in Grenada, as was mentioned in your report on the (CHOGM) in New Delhi in your December 15, 1983, issue. The prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago has said in his statement in Parliament on October 26 that the Government subscribes to the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states and the avoidance of the use of force in the settlement of disputes. He also regretted the use of force and the importation of military intervention into the Commonwealth Caribbean and expressed the Government's resolve to seek the earliest withdrawal of combat forces from Grenada.

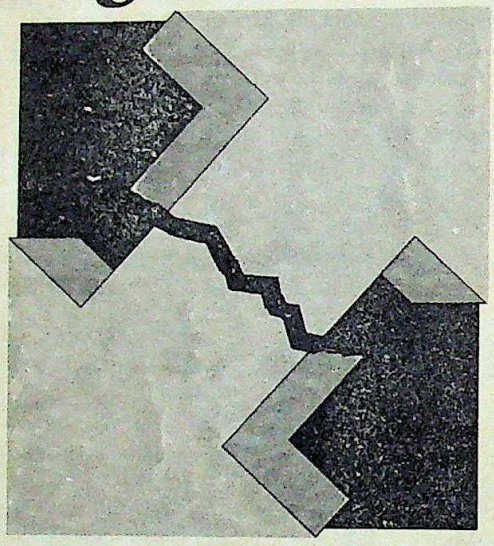
New Delhi *N. Hazel*
high commissioner for the Republic of
Trinidad and Tobago

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INDIA TODAY
THE COMPLETE NEWSMAGAZINE

Crippling Contradictions



A STRANGE contradiction is developing in our country: there is, on the one hand, a tremendous preoccupation with development, and there is, on the other hand, a growing indifference to the process of development. An indication of this contradiction was startlingly visible in the Lok Sabha in December. When the house took up the Planning Commission's mid-term evaluation of the Sixth Five-Year Plan, only a handful of members were found to be on their seats. The plan is the single most important preoccupation of the state, consuming a staggering Rs 97,000 crore in public sector outlays alone. Yet, discussion of its actual implemention draws only yawns from all manner of people.

Why is it that we have grown indifferent to the blueprint of our present and our future? Nietzsche said: "A matter that becomes clear ceases to concern us." Has it become clear to us that the plans make no difference to our lives? Or that the fruits of the plans are so assured that they do not need our concern? Obviously the answer to both questions is: no. There must be other reasons why the mainstream of the elites has seemingly disengaged from the plans, leaving it cynically to the politicians and the bureaucrats and their handpicked expert consultants to compose the five-yearly tomes and talk about them and do with them whatever they think can or ought to be done.

The public indifference to the entire development process stems primarily from the Planning Commission's failure to relate the plans to the ways of life of different segments of Indian society. Almost six plans have created an elitist, dominant way of life which is so cut off from the quality of life of the vast numbers of poor that it is no longer possible to look at the plans as harbingers of development with social justice and civic morality. Whatever rural programmes are initiated end up helping everyone else but the poor.

The elites may dwell in small enclaves but the way of life of the elites hypnotises the mass of humanity that looks at the glittering enclave with a dangerous mixture of awe, envy and anger. Professor Raj Krishna has estimated that in 1981-82 there were 300 million below the poverty line out of a total population of 692 million. And if what he calls the "Hindu rate of growth" of 3. 5 per cent in national income continues, as it is likely to do, there would be 472 million Indians below the poverty line—more than our population at the time of Independence—by the end of this century.

Obviously, some urgent, drastic and unconventional solutions are required. We seem to be enmeshed in a miasma of mimicry, blind to the pitfalls of copying the West, blind too, to the abundant caution that has restrained the West in its gallop to affluence. Our cities are becoming urban nightmares, because we want the fruits of urban living but lack the foresight to cope with its poisons. Our forests are mercilessly plundered for industrial and domestic uses, but we don't match this with parallel conservation. We want automation, we want growth, we want development, but we want to do it the way of the West, and cannot find enough jobs for the growing army of jobless.

Alternatives do not mean a return to Gandhian abstinence from the rewards of industrialisation. The clock of progress cannot and must not be set back. What is required is original, indigenous and workable solutions to some basic areas such as energy, population control, employment and industrialisation. If this sounds hackneyed it is only because we have been piously posturing on these issues while doing precious little to nurture them to reality. Obviously, there isn't the will or the policy framework to make a go of it.

If biogas plants are India's solution to the rural energy shortage, why are they so few that they are barely visible in the countryside? Why, if it is agreed that population control is seminal to easing poverty, is the family planning programme not retrieved from the morgue to which political expedience has consigned it and given the sort of importance in terms of status, money and manpower that say, the offshore petroleum drilling operation is given?

If it is the environment that we are concerned with, then why is it that its protection is so tentative and no firm guidelines are evolved to prevent the country from making the same mistakes as the West? If small is indeed beautiful then where is the evidence that we are moving away from giant, expensive and conspicuous projects to those based on technology that is more suited to a developing country? If it is adaptive solutions that are being sought, then why are the disciplines that this dictates —in terms of technology and bureaucratic guidelines—no more than lip service to an ideal?

Where are there to be found leaders who can answer these questions? Instead of expensive jamborees and international extravaganzas, why isn't attention focussed on a few, decisive areas which would help change the face of the country without the massive investments that are needed in large factories and power plants.

Nehru called the large factories and dams that he provided the new temples of India. Today's temples seem to be the infrastructure facilities for international conventions, summits and sports meets. India should instead worship humbler but disciplined time bound programmes in such areas as the creation of jobs, provision of water for drinking and irrigation, energy from both conventional and non-conventional sources, the creation of a new forest wealth and helping reduce the rate of growth of population. If attention could be focussed in this manner, not only would it bring development down from the stratosphere of the five-year plans to the grassroots level, it would change the face of the country.

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HIGH DRAMA & DARK DESPAIR

1·9·8·3

IT WAS A YEAR OF STARK CONTRASTS,
A YEAR WHEN DREAMS CAME TRUE & DREAMS WERE SHATTERED,
OF FANTASY-LIKE SPECTACLES & NIGHTMARE-LIKE VIOLENCE,
A YEAR WHICH REFLECTED
SOME OF THE BRIGHTEST & SOME OF THE DARKEST IN INDIA

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IN MULTIPLE ways, 1983 seemed to resemble one of Bombay's big-budget films. The extravagant sets and elaborate period costumes of NAM and CHOGM, which dominated the Indian screen, were liberally laced with epic battles, much cavorting and caterwauling, juicy scandals, comic interludes and extreme posturing. Fact, it appeared, took a back seat to fantasy and even the dialogue was tired and cliché-worn. At the end, the oddly familiar feeling was one of having seen and heard it all before.

NAM and CHOGM, with their glittering all-star casts and exotic locales like Goa, resembled nothing more than the elaborate song and dance routines Indian film makers seem addicted to. The epic battles, carefully choreographed by "fight master" Swraj Paul, placed him in the role of an ideal screen villain. His massive frame, bald pate and snarling dialogue only added to the similarity. The cavorting and caterwauling by the Opposition, cheerled by Farooq Abdullah, was a perfect counterpoint to the juicy scandals that surfaced with regularity. There was fantasy in full colour provided by the Government's pronouncements on everything from the Punjab problem to war threats from Pakistan and, finally, no posture could have been more film-like than that adopted by the fire-breathing fanatic, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

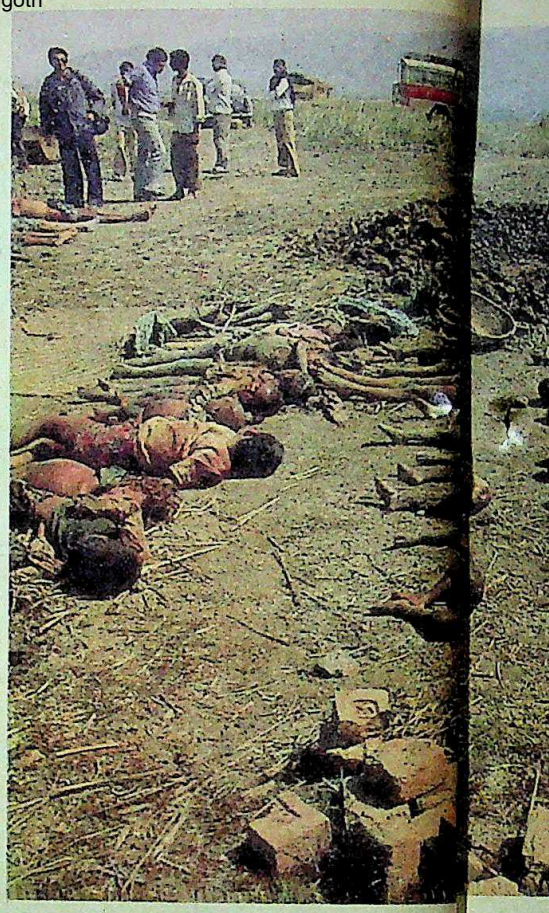
But if 1983 did resemble a celluloid pot-boiler, there was delicious irony in the fact that the opening scenes of the year were dominated by a flamboyant film star—N.T. Rama Rao. Virtually unknown except to south Indian film fans, he stormed onto the stage like one of the avenging angels he had portrayed so often on the screen. Sprouting evangelistic slogans peppered with dramatic film-style dialogue, NTR, as his expanding fan following preferred to call him, criss-crossed Andhra Pradesh in a converted caravan as unlikely candidate for chief minister in the January assembly elections. Matching Mrs Gandhi in stamina and staying power and overshadowing her in eloquence the NTR road show played everywhere to packed houses and eventually steam-rolled to one of the biggest electioneering upsets in history.

But by year's end, NTR was also proving to be one of the most enigmatic personalities to ever rule a state. Apparently winning the election proved too much of an emotional catharsis and the new-style politician adopted a bewildering succession of roles, each one stranger than the last. The initial Robin Hood role was quickly followed by the pious posturing of a monk at his devotions; saffron robes took the place of safari suits and a mud hut rudely replaced the ministerial mansion. The change of role, however, failed to find favour with his fans and even the addition of a diamond ear-drop could not conceal the fact that the glitter was fading fast.

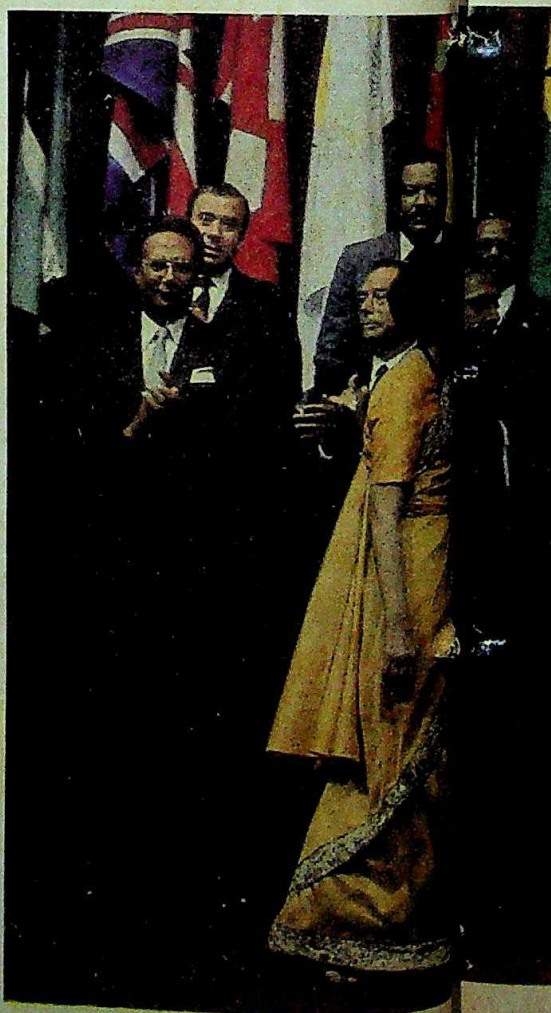
Meanwhile, NTR's counterpart in Karnataka, Ramakrishna Hegde was facing similar problems. After the first bright flush of victory, the bearded, thespian-like chief minister's career read like a Ludlum thriller, replete with plots and counter-plots, secret assignations in the night, double agents, defections and damning tape-recordings. Bravely fighting a running battle for survival, Hegde's James Bond act succeeded somewhat in thwarting the evil designs of archetypal villains C. M. Stephen and Veerappa Moily—but only just.

But if the sole Janata stronghold was threatened, the party's titular president, Chandra Shekhar, was busy wearing out a different kind of sole. Resembling some inspired biblical figure, Chandra Shekhar set off on a long and lonely walk through rural India. But after six months, 4,000 kilometres and six pairs of chappals, it still looked like the Old Turk had miles to go before he slept.

Gimmickry, however, had its moments, as the queen of the badlands, Phoolan Devi, so crudely revealed. Creatively built up by the press into a cross between Zeenat Aman, Annie Oakley and The Rani of Jhansi, Phoolan Devi's surrender was something of an international event. It was also something of an anticlimax. Stripped of her media hype, the dacoit queen turned out to be a foul-mouthed slut with the morals of an alley cat and the baser instincts



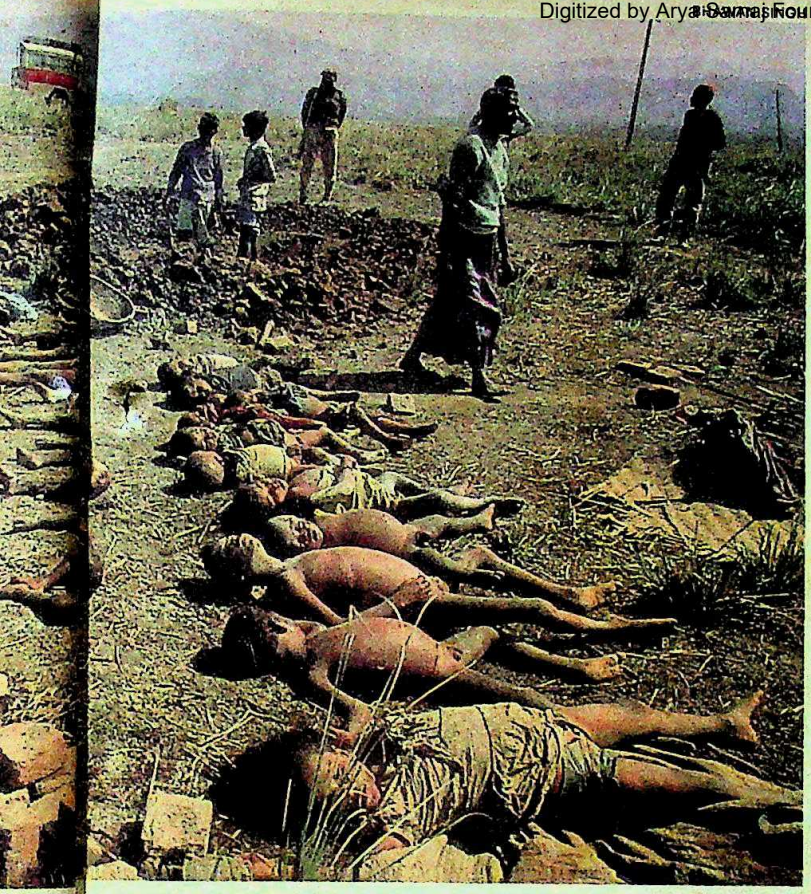
Nellie was India's darkest hour. The slaughter of 1,383 men, women and children on the banks of the Brahmaputra during the turbulent Assam assembly elections shocked the world, but the Centre, undeterred, installed a state government. Even as Assam bled, Mrs Gandhi made a glittering bid to grab the spotlight on the world stage, playing host to the leaders of nearly a hundred countries assembled in New Delhi for the Non-aligned Meet. Eight months later, Mrs Gandhi's campaign for international eminence hit another high when she strode into the limelight as chairperson of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meet.



HIGH DRAMA & DARK DESPAIR
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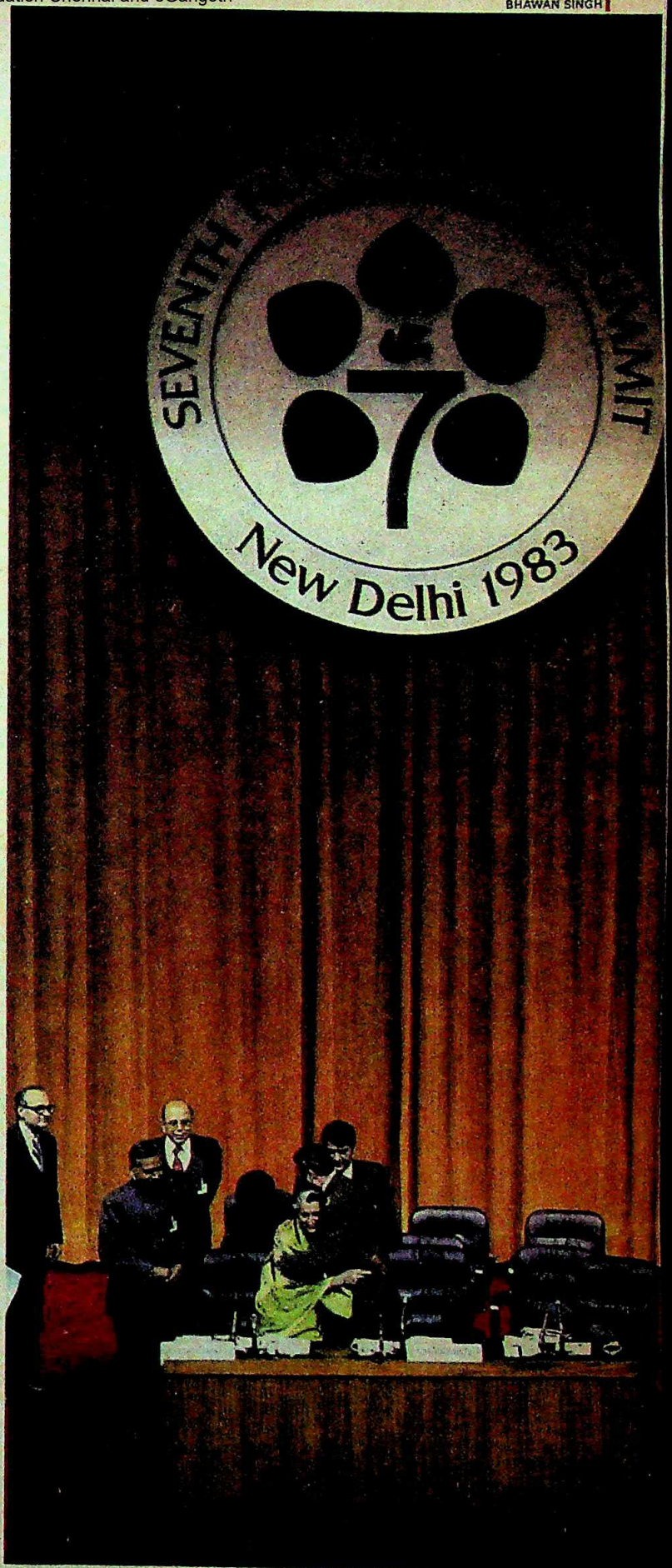
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BHAWAN SINGH



RAGHU RAI



BHAWAN SINGH

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of a small-time hood. As a non-event, it had no parallels unless one included the long-awaited surrender of Babasaheb Bhosale as chief minister of Maharashtra.

But the one event that did stand out in stark and terrible relief was the bloody convulsion in Assam resulting from the Government's tragic blunder in forcing an election. Of all the events of 1983, that one poignant photograph of babies lined up for burial after the Nellie massacre will continue to haunt the country's conscience long after the rest have faded into oblivion.

It was 1983's darkest hour, made darker by the fact that the Government was preoccupied with the elaborate preparations for the Non-aligned Meet (NAM) while pointedly ignoring the fact that a bloodbath had taken place in its backyard. Not even the glitter and gaiety of NAM could overshadow the mounting evidence that the Government had adequate warning of the impending slaughter and still went ahead with its decision to force an unpopular government on the troubled state.

At virtually the same time, another state was giving warning of impending catastrophe and again it was the Centre's procrastination that fuelled the flames. In Punjab, the Akali talks remained deadlocked and from the cold ashes emerged the malevolent figure of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, raising visions of another Ayatullah Khomeini in the making.

CLEVERLY stoking the fires of Sikh chauvinism, Bhindranwale seemed to strike a responsive chord in the villages of Punjab, eventually garnering enough support from extreme elements to thumb his aquiline nose at the Government. Surrounded by armed men and holed up in the sacred precincts of the Golden Temple, the Sikh fanatic threatened to eliminate all Hindus in Punjab, a threat that inspired a wave of brutal killings in the state. By year's end, Punjab was still ruled by the gun while the Opposition's demand for Bhindranwale's arrest was brushed aside by the Centre's weak-kneed dalliance.

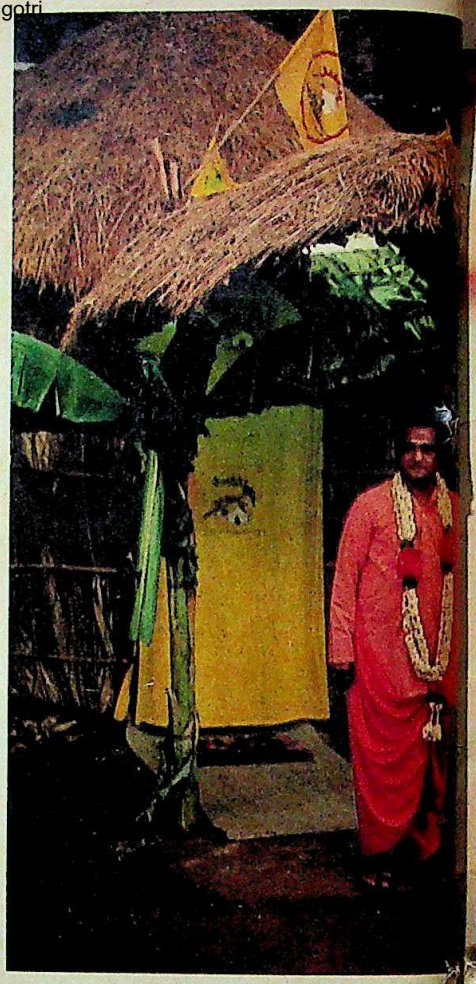
Instead, the ruling party made a much-published effort to set its own house in disorder by taking the 80-year-old Kamlapati Tripathi out of mothballs and propping him up as the new president of the party. The palsied look of the Congress(I) symbol of the hand was somewhat diluted when Rajiv Gandhi was, not surprisingly, elevated to general secretary—a move that was intended to put some life into the party.

With great flourish, the party offices were refurbished and modernised to fit in with the new go-getting image. Elaborate maps and charts were unfurled and it looked like the electronic age had finally caught up with the party.

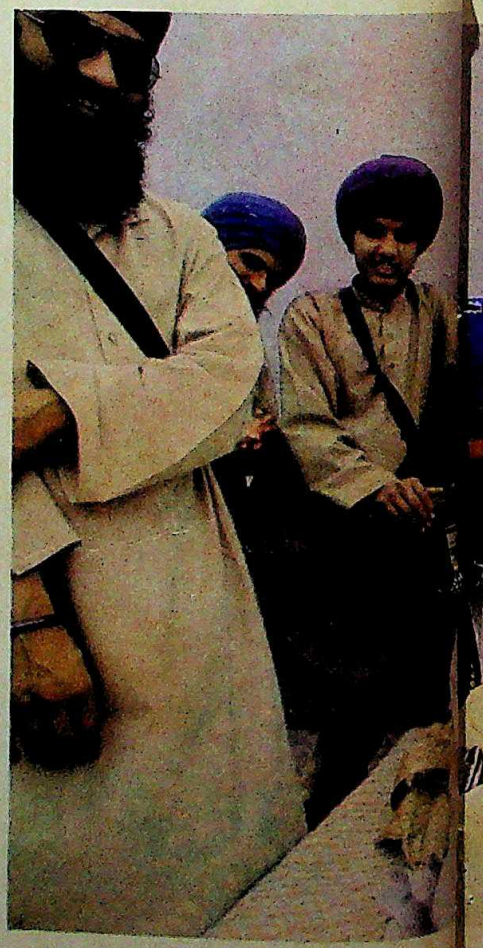
But eventually, what it apparently amounted to was the refurbishing of Rajiv. The heir apparent's grooming reached a peak in 1983. Every opportunity was afforded him to brush up his image whether it was touring the country giving pep talks to party workers, as privileged guest at NAM or CHOGM banquets, gracing minor functions on television or radio and even as VIP guest of the Soviet Union. Obviously his mother, and the party's undying faith in his hidden talents remained undiminished, but by the end of the year, they were still largely hidden to the rest of the populace.

The other Gandhi, meanwhile, was sitting back and sharpening her claws. Though her political fortunes took a nosedive through most of the year, Maneka Gandhi still managed to score some telling points in her crusade to outlaw her former in-laws. Aided considerably by Mrs Gandhi's hysterical outbursts against her, Maneka maintained her cool and lost no opportunity to get in her little digs at the ruling family and party. In April, she formally launched her own private party, the Rashtriya Sanjay Manch but it eventually proved manch ado about nothing.

April was proving the cruellest month for quite a few people. In the southern metropolis of Madras, taps ran dry as an unprecedented water crisis paralysed the city. Tamil Nadu Chief



Conquering hero turned conquering political messiah N.T. Rama Rao stormed the Congress(I)'s Telugu citadel but proved to be a quick-change artiste in policy and dress matters, though he still stood out as the most visible opposition politician. Rajiv Gandhi assiduously nursed his hidden talents and played his rosettes close to his chest as the Congress(I) brushed off the cobwebs and went in for a new go-getting image. Maneka Gandhi kept up her one-woman crusade against the ruling family, but her Rashtriya Sanjay Manch turned out to be a one-woman party and made fewer and fewer ripples. Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, safely out of the Government's reach in his Amritsar headquarters, stoked the fires of Sikh chauvinism in an increasingly troubled Punjab.



HIGH DRAMA & DARK DESPAIR
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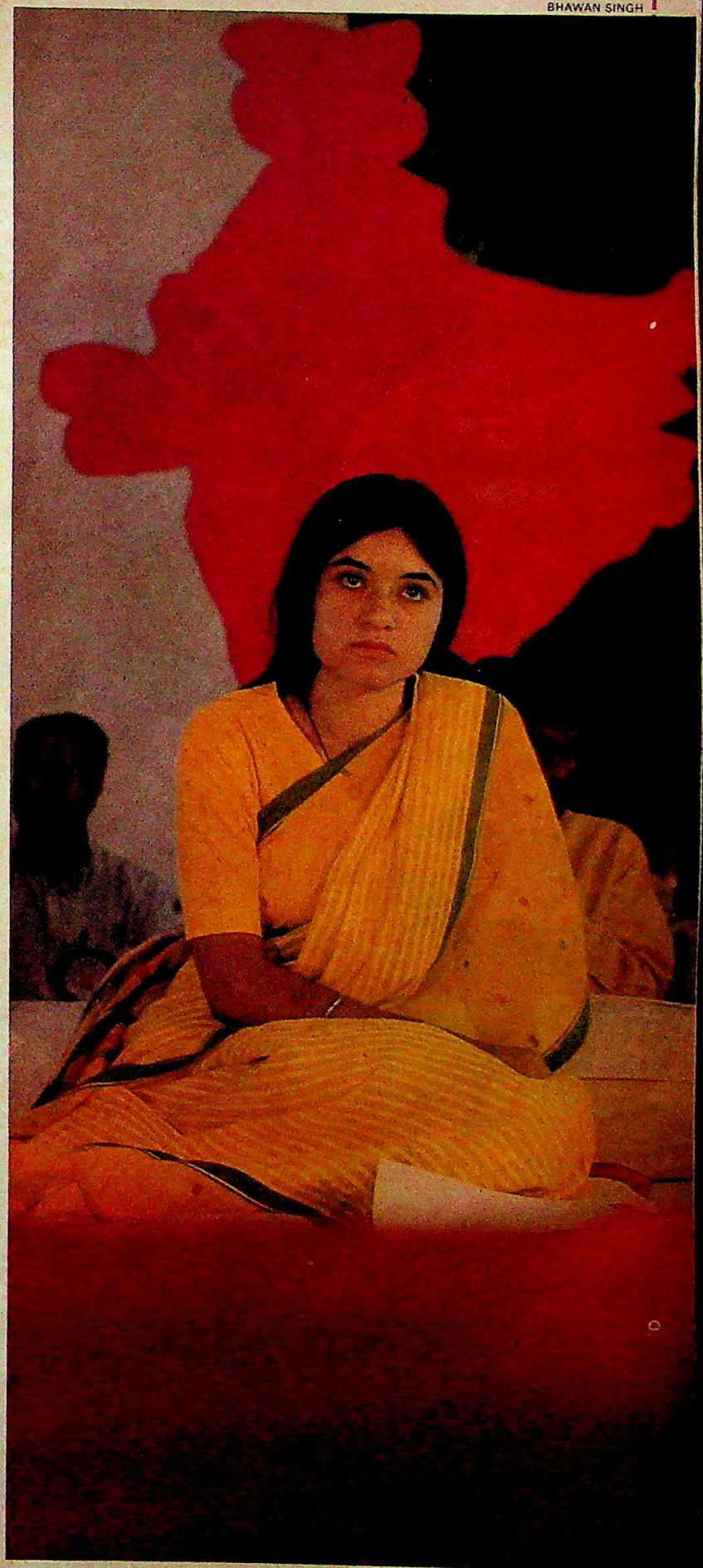
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BHAWAN SINGH



BHAWAN SINGH



RAGHU RAI



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Minister, M.G. Ramachandran, in keeping with his image, conjured up everything from musical concerts to magicians to mass prayers but the queues snaking out from city water taps continued their unrewarding vigil. Finally, when ancient methods had failed, modern technology was invoked in the form of a cloud-seeding aircraft from abroad. In the event, by the time the cloud-seeding operation was half-way over, the heavens moved and Madras's water crisis was over, till the next time, that is.

Up north, things were hotting up as well. The rolling hills of Jammu & Kashmir were alive with the sound of discordant music as the state geared up for elections. The stakes were sky-high as was the prestige involved. Farooq Abdullah, the young cub, in a parody of the situation at the Centre, was determined to don the mantle of chief minister worn so long by his late father. And for the Congress(I), it was a heaven-sent opportunity to install itself in the strategic state.

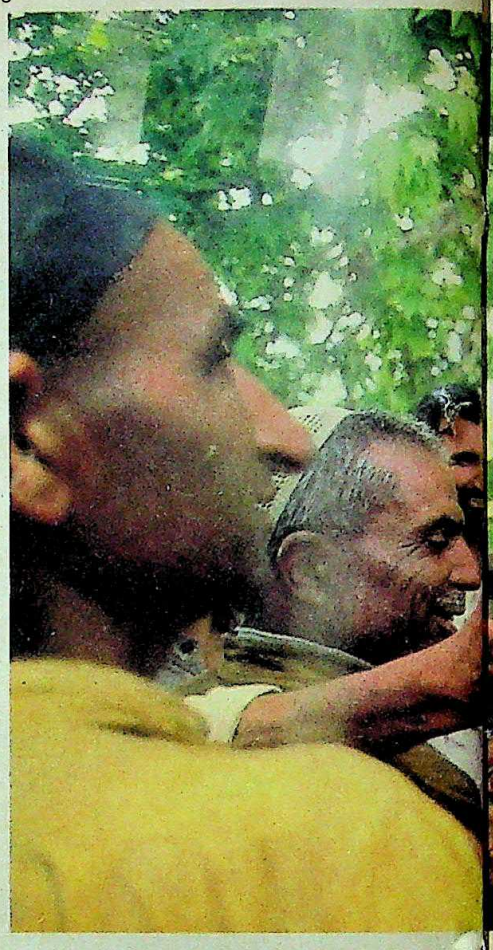
Not unpredictably, the battle was savage and often sordid. Not only were communal flames fanned but also those of the Congress(I) headquarters in Srinagar, which was set ablaze in rather unusual circumstances. Farooq, bruised and battered, emerged victorious. By December, however, Farooq's roars were reduced to whimpers as he battled against persistent destablising forays by an uncowed Congress(I).

SIMILAR forays were simultaneously being launched in the corporate world. Except, in this case, the destabilisation had set in before the destabilised were aware of it. London-based industrialist Swraj Paul burrowed secretly under the foundations of corporate kingpins Escorts and DCM by buying up chunks of their shares and then making a bid for take-over. Escorts Chairman H.P. Nanda and his DCM counterpart Bharat Ram found their blood pressure rising as fast as their company share prices as they scrabbled to retain control. Paul was helped along by the Government which obligingly issued an ordinance clarifying that his companies did qualify for the controversial non-resident investment scheme even though the Reserve Bank had obviously not made any thoroughgoing check. Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee's interventions in the controversy helped clear the way and Paul, in keeping with his image, also added psychological pressure by launching verbal broadsides at India's corporate structure at every opportunity he got—and some that he didn't.

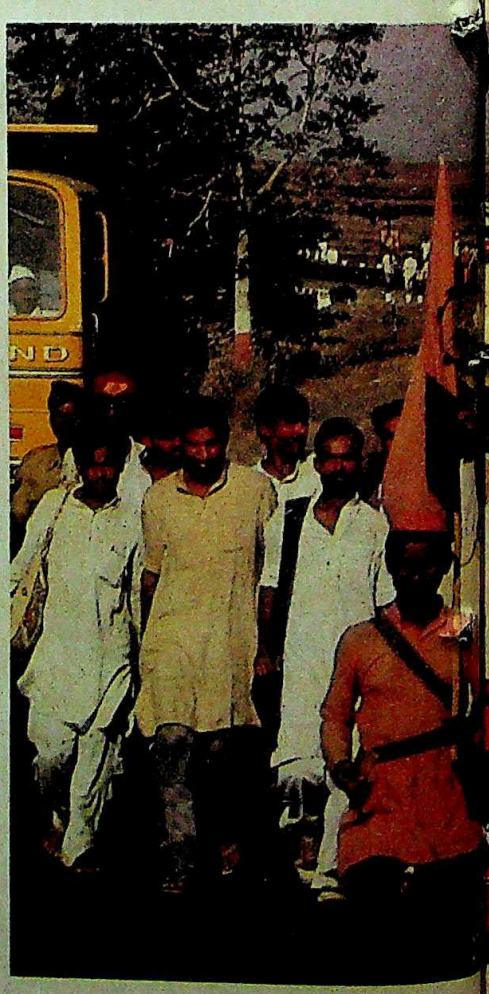
There were other myths under attack elsewhere, as American journalist Seymour Hersh charged that great moralist and former prime minister Morarji Desai with being a CIA mole. For a man of Desai's lily-white reputation, the slur could not have been more serious. Hotly denying the allegation and swept up in the wave of indignation that arose from his countrymen, Desai slapped a million dollar lawsuit on the bewildered Hersh.

It certainly seemed a year when journalists were finally getting their own back on Desai. Another journalist, to whom Desai had entrusted confidential correspondence, promptly published them since the letters contained moderately sensational revelations regarding the relationship between Desai and the then President, Sanjiva Reddy, during the Janata period. Meanwhile, the outcome of Desai's lawsuit against Hersh remained unresolved and with it, the credence or otherwise, of Hersh's claim.

Credibility was a factor that the Opposition, all four of them, still seemed to be desperately searching for throughout 1983 without much visible success. Their periodic unity moves only appeared to push them further apart. The one exception was the surprise mating of Jat leader Charan Singh's Lok Dal and Atal Behari Vajpayee's BJP into the NDA which added an intriguing element to the jigsaw puzzle of opposition alignments. About the only issue that they seemed united on was their petulant protestations that they were being unfairly treated by the Centre. In fact, there were fast-moving developments in Centre-state relationships.



Farooq Abdullah won his spurs and secured the Sheikh's legacy by roaring his way to a rousing victory in the Jammu & Kashmir assembly elections. Non-resident heavyweight Swraj Paul tilted at resident tycoons after serving himself substantial shares of their equity cake. Karnataka's Ramakrishna Hegde scored points off the Congress(I) in the tapes scandal and managed to beat off an opposition assault on the only Janata Government in the country. Dacoit queen Phoolan Devi, built up as the heroine of the badlands, proved a foul-mouthed let-down at her surrender ceremony in Madhya Pradesh. A.B. Vajpayee and Charan Singh tied yet another knot in the confusing tangle of opposition alignments by forming the National Democratic Alliance. Janata Party President Chandra Shekhar led his portrait and a band of footsore followers in a marathon six-month swing through India, but judging from his party's progress report, he was walking to stay in the same place.

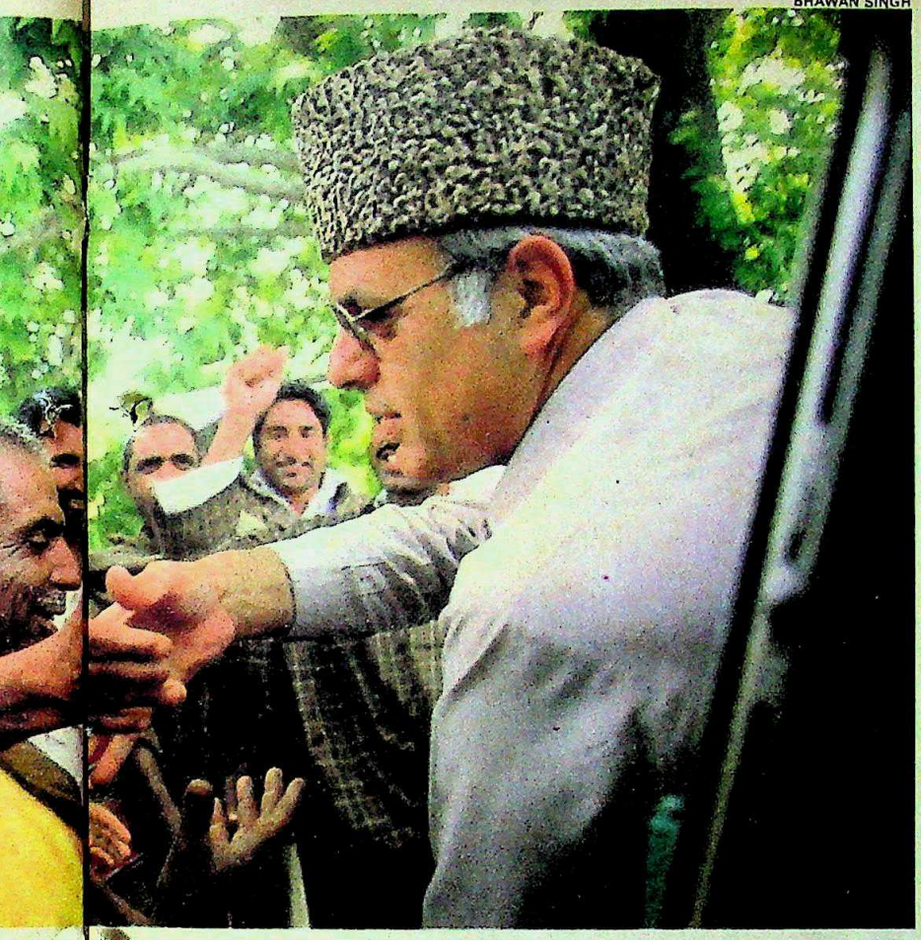


HIGH DRAMA & DARK DESPAIR
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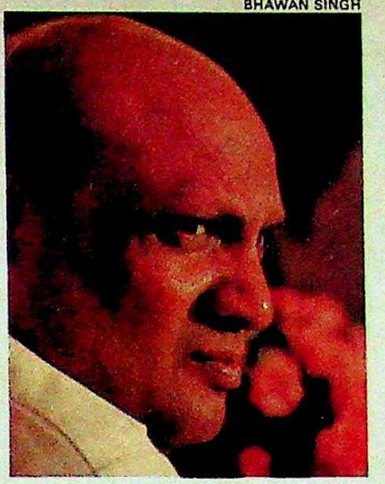
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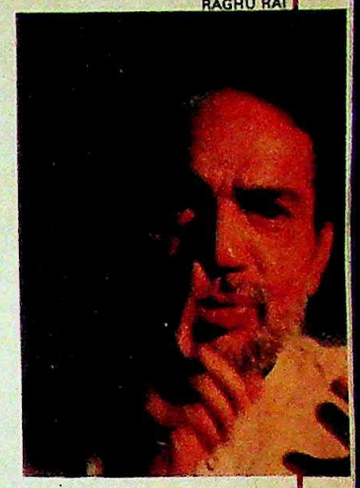
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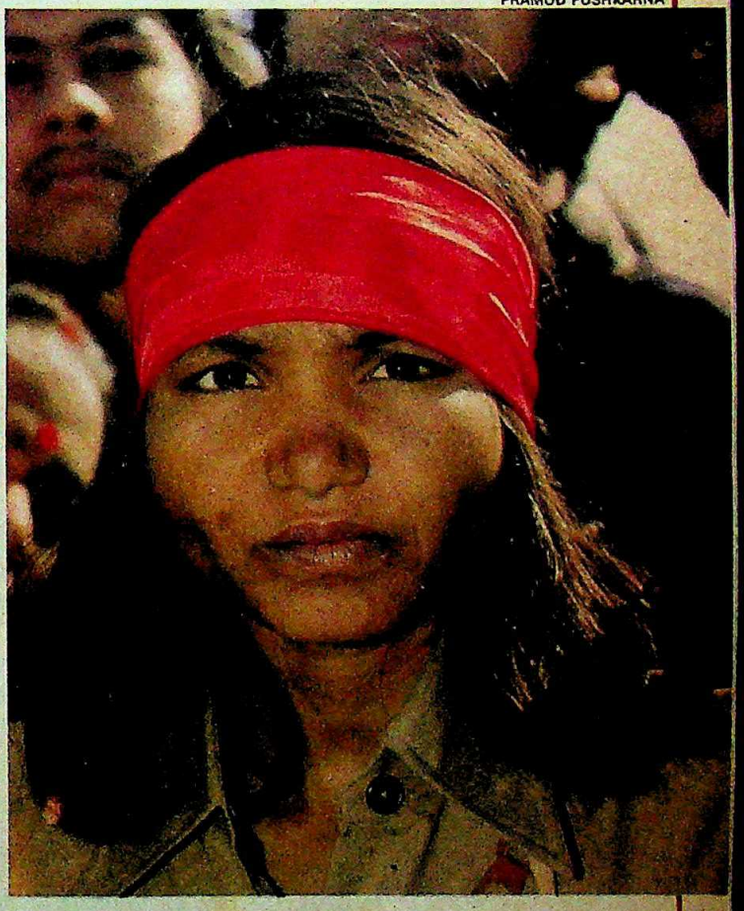
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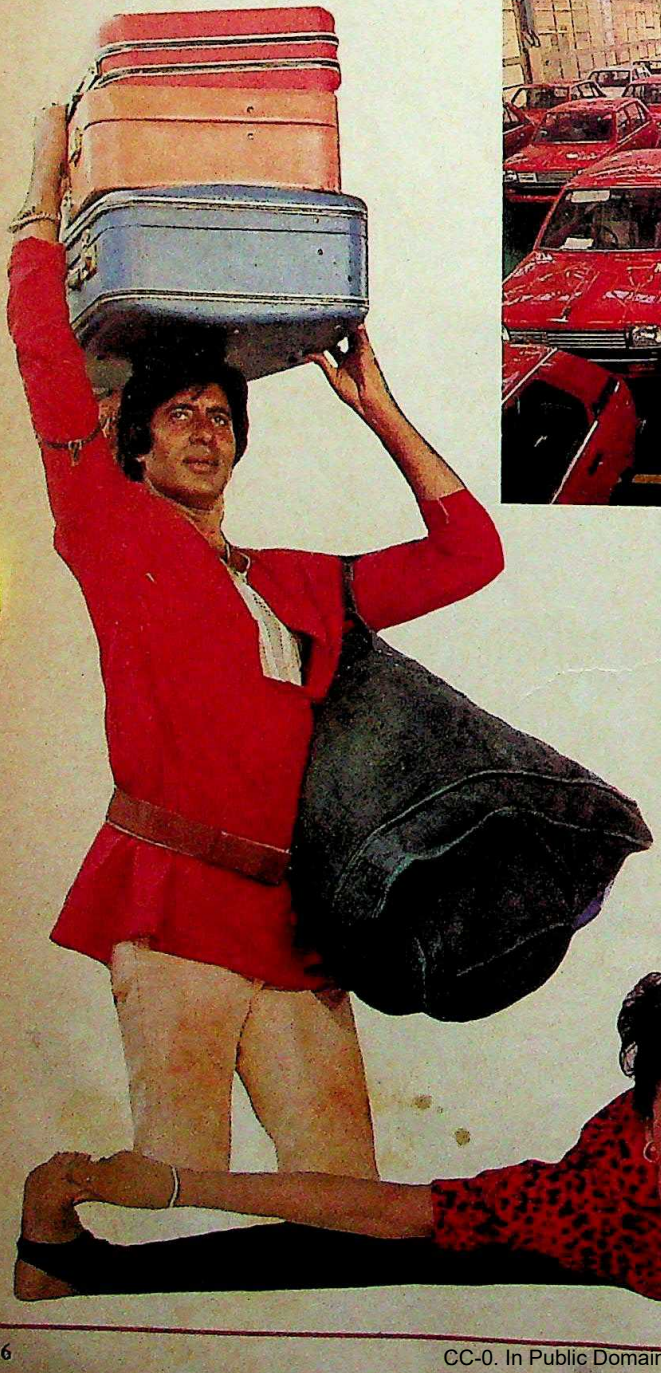
RAGHU RAI

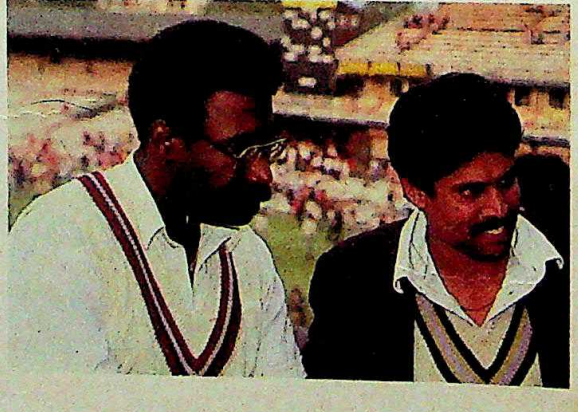


Swami Dhirendra Brahmachari's fortunes took a nosedive when police raided his gun factory in Jammu. The Marutis, made in Japan, were at long last ready to hit the road. Kapil Dev and his Devils pulled off an incredible victory over Clive Lloyd's West Indians at Lord's to win the Prudential World Cup, but in the subsequent Test series the calypso cricketers were laughing all the way to the pavilion. Film star Rekha took time off from three-shift schedules to stretch her way to a sound Fonda-tion. Amitabh Bachchan lifted excess baggage in **Coolie,** *on whose sets he had been laid low with a blow to the guts last year, but most of his on-screen performances were anything but heroic.*

BHAWAN SINGH







HIGH DRAMA & DARK DESPAIR 1·9·8·3



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M.G. Ramachandran undertook a fast to protest against rice
tage in Tamil Nadu but the Centre remained unmoved.
opposition leaders were also seeing red, including Marxist
Minister Jyoti Basu, whose running battle with the Centre wa
running to full houses by the end of the year.

Further afield, there were ominous developments as Sri
indulged in an orgy of blood-letting against the Tamil popula
the island. The violence spread like wildfire and the threat
Indian intervention seemed imminent. A panicky Pre
Jayewardene sent out urgent sos's to various countries, incl
Pakistan, for help; but fortunately the violence subsided b
matters could come to a head. But the tension in the region st
mained at half cock by year's end.

Ironically enough, most of the regional leadership were s
closeted in companionable comradeship when the Commonwe
club got its show on the road. The aperitif however proved n
noteworthy than the main course. The Queen of England's
comprehensively upstaged the Commonwealth conclave, des
Maggie and Denis Thatcher. The Commonwealth, observers
agreed, had very little in common apart from cricket and croquet.

Still, there were signs that the Raj was all the rage. Smitten by nostalgia, hordes of film crews took passage to India to resurrect memories of pink gins, punkahs and paniwalas in such endeavours as *Heat and Dust, The Far Pavilions* and *Kim*. Meanwhile, life was imitating art as a messy spy scandal enlivened the dying moments of the year. Top-ranking retired defence officers were exposed as members of a CIA network stealing top secret information on Soviet weaponry.

But the Larkins case was merely the last in a series of scandals that popped up at regular intervals throughout the year. The beef tallow case, richly adorned with political and religious implications, snowballed into a sizzling controversy during the second half of the year, while the last quarter of 1983 was scandalised by another sacred cow, Swami Dhirendra Brahmachari. Led by the redoubtable Farooq Abdullah, a posse of policemen raided the yoga teacher's gun factory in Jammu and unearthed evidence of underhand activity concerning the import of gun barrels from Spain. The Swami claimed feebly that Farooq was gunning for him to get back at the Centre, but by year-end, the big question was whether or not the self-styled Swami could get himself back to the Centre.

But eventually the most scandalous affair of all turned out to be the Indian cricket team's fortunes, which were considerably embellished by their sensational Prudential World Cup win in June. Typically, the win triggered off hysterical scenes back home and the returning heroes were elevated to virtual immortality. The crowning moment came when supersinger Lata Mangeshkar sang in an elaborate show for Kapil's Devils in the capital.

Meanwhile, Amitabh Bachchan was having a devil of a time keeping his popularity from sinking. Indifferent performances and ill-chosen films didn't help and neither did his allegedly on-off relationship with an adoring Rekha which was recounted blow-by-blow in the film rags. Rekha herself was busy toning up her own image by an Indianised version of Jane Fonda's workout sessions. She should have offered free membership to the Indian cricket team which by the end of the year, was being stoned and abused following their amateur theatricals against Clive Lloyd's West Indians.

The year did, however, manage to end on an optimistic note when the first Maruti car was assembled and released on the road. And, even though it was Japanese down to the last screw, there was hope at last that the Indian automotive industry was finally emerging from the Stone Age. But like most Bombay films, the final note of optimism was the epilogue to a complicated web of entaglements. The Punjab issue, renewed rumblings in Assam, the spiralling price rise, communal flashpoints and institutionalised corruption were grim pointers to 1984, along with the tantalising question mark that still hovered over the possibility of a mid-term poll.

—DILIP BOBB



Singh & Sunny Deol



the business without an ego. I am nting to help the cause of good the process. SHASHI KAPOOR

, to be frank, we would always do if it meant abstaining from sex. AMITABH BACHCHAN

that can contribute to social re- be to do something, however in- men of India. ZEENAT AMAN

ey just sit at a desk and write. SALMAN RUSHDIE

h primitive people telling vir- V.S. NAIPAUL

Paul) is undesirable. He is a good as settled abroad who have really good job of it.

H.P. NANDA, *Escorts chairman*

I have paid Rs 13 crore to tell them they are dacoits.

SWRAJ PAUL *on the Nanda and Bharat Ram families*

I told him (Morarji) not to give the papers. We could ourselves make money from them but he didn't listen. My father thinks he knows everything. KANTI DESAI

I have always been a victim of unfair trade practices because I am a careless shopper. I buy the first thing the shopkeeper offers and find it is sub-standard. VICE-PRESIDENT M HIDAYATULLAH

● DEFIANCE AND DESPAIR

We Sikhs are not like the Assamese. We know how to sacrifice our lives. At the same time, we know how to cut others into pieces. JARNAIL SINGH BHINDRANWALE

The rot in India is all-pervasive. You can buy a civil service job, you can buy a university degree, you can buy an industrial licence. The entire polity joins Mrs Warren's profession.

DR ASHOK MITRA, *West Bengal finance minister*

With advancing age and an erratic memory, she (Mrs Gandhi) is suffering from great mental strain... it is not in the interest of the country to have an unwell prime minister. MANEKA GANDHI

If I get any opportunity, I don't mind acting in movies.

R. GUNDU RAO, *former Karnataka chief minister*

Please don't kill me. I'm a football player.

last words of KHAIDEM IMOCHA, *18, before being shot dead by a Manipur Rifles commando*

● INDIRA-NOTES

The people of Andhra Pradesh stood by me whenever I was in trouble. Today I am in trouble. Please come and help me.

electioneering in ANDHRA PRADESH *in January*

I am an old woman now and am not able to read without my glasses. *at an election meeting in* HYDERABAD *in January*

I shan't be able to ring you about the article. Isn't our phone system terrible? They call it crossbar. I think they mean crosswire. *to a* FOREIGN JOURNALIST *after an interview in June*

I would be powerful if I could do exactly as I wanted but I cannot. I have never felt that I am leading, even though I have been here for so long. I feel funny when people call me prime minister.

in an interview to WOMEN'S OWN *magazine*

I am trying to take the party in a particular direction but some people listen to me and most don't. That is not my fault... I mean, they are grown-up people. *in* THE TIMES OF INDIA *in September*

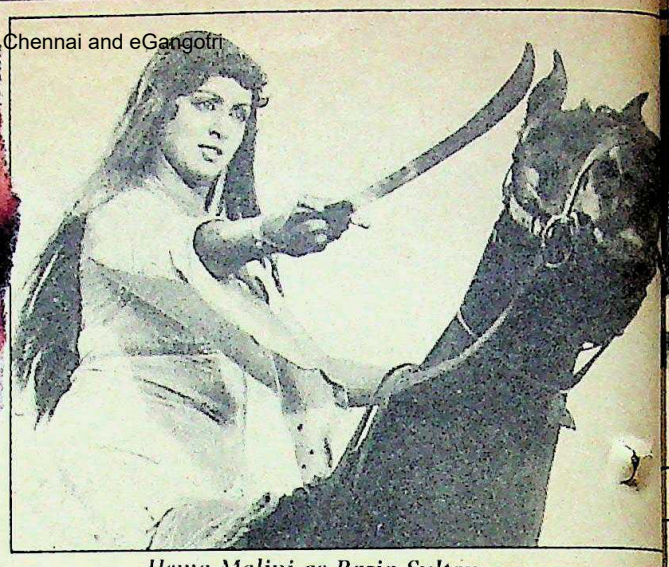
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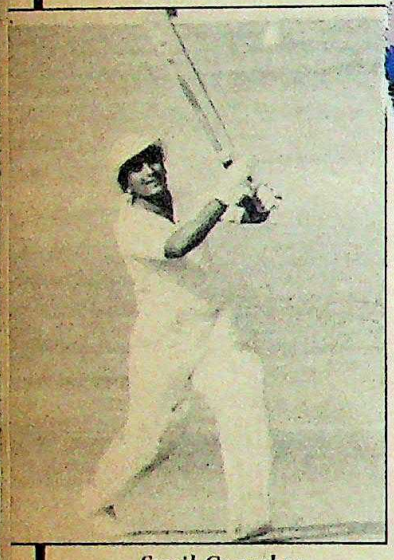


Salman Rushdie





Hema Malini as Razia Sultan



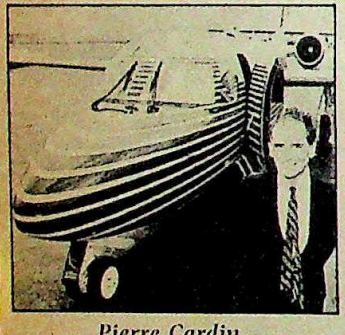
Sunil Gavaskar



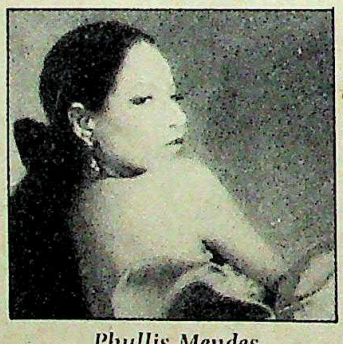
Kamal Hassan & Sridevi



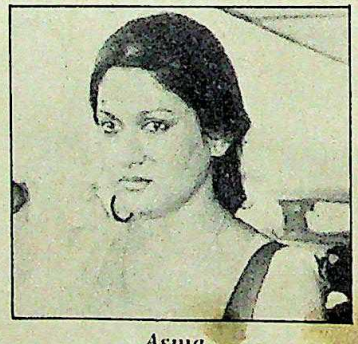
Saira Banu & Dilip Kuma



Pierre Cardin



Phyllis Mendes



Asma

There's no business like showbiz....and the show did go on laced with heartaches and heart-breaks, scandals and sensations, fads and foibles mingled with box-office disasters and record-breaking triumphs. There were also some unusual role reversals, when cricket stars turned into aspirant film stars. And the excitement was sustained throughout the year by the arrival of droves of foreign celebrities.

In the world of contemporary literature, easily the most exciting event was the arrival of author Salman Rushdie early in the year. The Booker Prize-winning novelist turned to be as vivid and skilful a speaker as a juggler of words—he proved his reputation when his second book *Shame* was hailed by critics as better than his first.

In the world of sport, cricketer Sunil Gavaskar set another kind of record: by scoring the highest number of runs in Test cricket, and by surpassing Don Bradman for the highest number of centuries, he established himself as the unassailable superstar of World cricket.

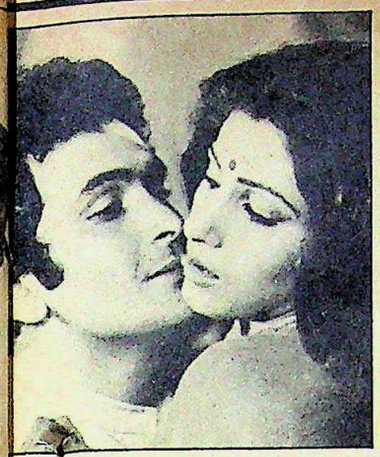
And in the eclectic world of fashion, the occasion that overtook all others was the arrival of French couture king Pierre Cardin to announce tie-ups with a hotel chain for establishing restaurants and boutiques all over the country. The splash was confirmed with his long-legged Goan model Phyllis Mendes, known as Anjolie back in Paris, being appointed in charge of his business in Bombay.

The foreign invasion was matched by a new set of raiders from the deep south who shook up the film industry. The previous year's migrations of Rati Agnihotri, Kamal Hassan and Rajnikant, turned in 1983 into a mighty roar: sex symbols Silk Smita, Sridevi and Jaya Prada collectively stormed the bastions of the Hindi cinema, proving once again that nothing succeeds in tinseltown like a seat on the southern express. Local flavour in the film world was further dampened by stars seeking redress, making amends and banishing the last traces of scandal. Still, there were moments when they hit the headlines such as Madras matinee idol Gemini Ganesan's attempted suicide or the instant crash of Kamal Amrohi's seven-year-in-the-making dream *Razia Sultan*, reported to have cost between Rs 6 crore and Rs 9 crore. Other slated hits that turned turkey at the box-office included B.R. Chopra's *Mazdoor* that sent veteran star Dilip Kumar's image plummeting. This was a further blow to the thespian's reputation after his marriage to sultry socialite Asma broke up and he returned to his first wife Saira.

While ex-wife Dimple Kapadia was working double shift

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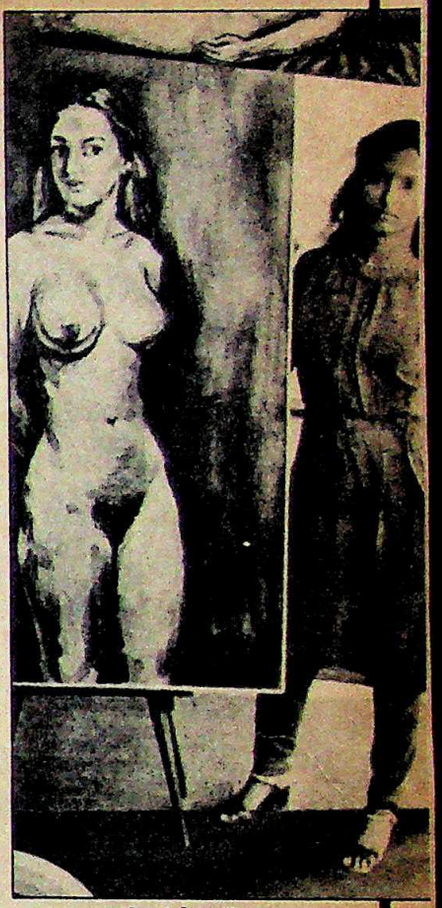
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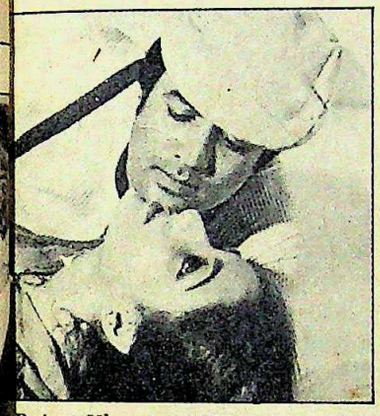


Rishi Kapoor & Dimple



Amrita Singh & Sunny Deol





Rajest Khanna & Tina Munim



Syed Kirmani & Sandeep Patil

Savithri Raman



Sanjay Dutt & Rati



Salma Agha & Mahmud Sipra



Mrs Gandhi with Rakesh Sharma

to reinforce her comeback on the screen, her former husband was consorting with actress Tina Munim; filmi peccadilloes were made knottier by Tina's erstwhile boy-friend Sunjay Dutt holing up with fast-selling shooting star Rati Agnihotri.

Instant stardom was in short supply. And in a context bedevilled by unexpected flops, the year's biggest hit was a piece of frothy juvenile waffle called *Betaab*: rapidly establishing its leading pair, Sunny Deol and Amrita Singh, as the most redoubtable of the crop of young ones hankering to see their name in lights.

Teaming up in real life were actresses Reena Roy, who plans to quit the film scene to marry Pakistani cricketer Mohsin Khan and silvery-voiced Salma Agha who announced her engagement to London-based businessman Mahmud Sipra. And there were star-turns from the cricketing pitch as well, when Sandeep Patil and Syed Kirmani joined hands to act in the Hindi film *Kabhi Ajnabi The*.

While foreigners came trooping into the heat and dust in an effort to re-create a bygone world of an empire, Indian actors like Amrish Puri and Roshan Seth winged their way to Hollywood to star in American whizzkid Steven Spielberg's forthcoming epic. Back home after a wild and long search, a schoolboy by the name of Ravi Sheth was handpicked by an Anglo-American TV network to reincarnate Kipling's lovable rogue, Kim.

A furore was caused on the otherwise placid contemporary art scene when Bangalore-based artist Savithri Raman sent voyeurs and critics reeling with her nude self-portraits and later experimented with a variety of languorous nude male models.

There was champagne flowing in the corridors of South Block when Squadron Leader Rakesh Sharma was chosen as India's first astronant to go up in space in 1984. It was a suitably Orwellian note to end the year, in which the only meteors to rocket past the horizon had been stars of another breed.

SIGN POSTS

■ **Awarded:** *Gandhi* swept the Oscar sweepstakes in Los Angeles by winning eight Oscar awards, which included one for Bombay-based costume designer Bhanu Athaiya.

■ **Appointed:** Dr Raja Ramanna, the eminent nuclear physicist took over as chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission.

■ **Died:** Industrialist G.D. Birla, 89, the last of the business titans, in London. Starting virtually from scratch he built a huge industrial empire.

■ **Died:** Piloo Mody, 57, the ebullient Janata Party leader and Rajya Sabha MP, of a heart attack. A lively thinker, he was most memorable for his tremendous sense of humour.

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CHILDREN

Speaking Out

PARVEEN is a six-year-old, bright-eyed, lively and shyly smiling. Were it not for her close-cropped hair she could pass off as a little boy, something she has always wanted to be. Her mother complains that she behaves like one, disappearing from home for hours to play in the crowded streets of the walled city of Old Delhi. She feeds on what she can find on the streets, occasionally begging for a coin and often returning home late in the evening, having run loose and wild and barefoot in the alleys all day.

But Parveen has no home to speak of. When she was a year old her mother Phuljahan, abandoned by her husband and thrown out by her father, brought her two daughters to live on the steps of Jama Masjid, the great Friday Mosque of the Mughal emperors. Here, on the long cold sandstone steps, against the slab of an ancient wall, they have made their home—a ragbag of a few aluminium pots and pans, a tattered mattress and some old clothes.

Last week, as city temperatures dropped, little Parveen was freezing on the steps. While her mother spoke about what she hoped for her daughters' future, Parveen hugged her tin plate for comfort, nibbling a few scraps of leftovers. "I tell her to come with me to houses," said Phuljahan, who with her older daughter works as a domestic in nearby homes. "At least she will learn some decency. But she won't listen to me. All day she roams the streets. Sometimes I wish someone would just take her away—at least I won't know her fate. The way it is, it's terrible."

Grinning slyly at her mother's admonishing Parveen looked like a carefree tramp—pink-cheeked, independent-minded, free-spirited. A childhood, however deprived and difficult, has its compensations. But if your eyes shifted from Parveen's joyous beaming face to her feet, any compensation looked bleak. Calloused and grimy, their nails bitten and heels cracked, they were the feet of a hard-labouring adult. They made this sprightly child appear bitter and aged and, in all probability, they entrenched her life in a precarious tightrope walk along the poverty line.

Deprived Generation: An estimated 45 per cent of India's urban children, and 55 per cent in the rural areas out of a total child population of 260 million, live below subsistence level. Like little Parveen, they are condemned to a life without adequate food, clothing or shelter. About 16.3 million Indian children, or roughly 5 per cent of the total number, are further sentenced to labour— they work on farms and in factories and will grow up unable to read or write. Less than 5 per cent of India's children attend pre-school. Over a hundred per 100,000 Indian children are totally physically handicapped. Up to 40,000 a year go blind due to a deficiency of vital Vitamin A. Over a million in the age group 1–4 years die every year due to sickness, 60 per cent of them within a month of being born. But the most lethal killer of all remains starvation: it takes toll of about 100,000 children each month according to UNICEF statistics.

In China, India's neighbouring giant, the most



I do not have any admiration for any leader and there is nobody's example I like to follow. I will chart my own course.

—FASIH AHMED, 13, Patna



We have a President who has not gone beyond the II standard. We call ourselves a socialist republic but we have a monarchist rule. This is going against everything we fought for.

—GITANJALI SRIRAM, 15, Bombay



I am always for India. I am just proud of it. I mean to say for a country like ours which has been under British rule for such a long time it's really very good.

—PRIYA BIDDAPPA, 15, Bangalore



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RAGHU RAI



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All MLA's in Congress(I) want to be ministers and all ministers, including my father, want to be chief minister. They have never done anything good for the country. They are scheming night and day how to outsmart each other.

—LIZA RAVI, 12, Kerala

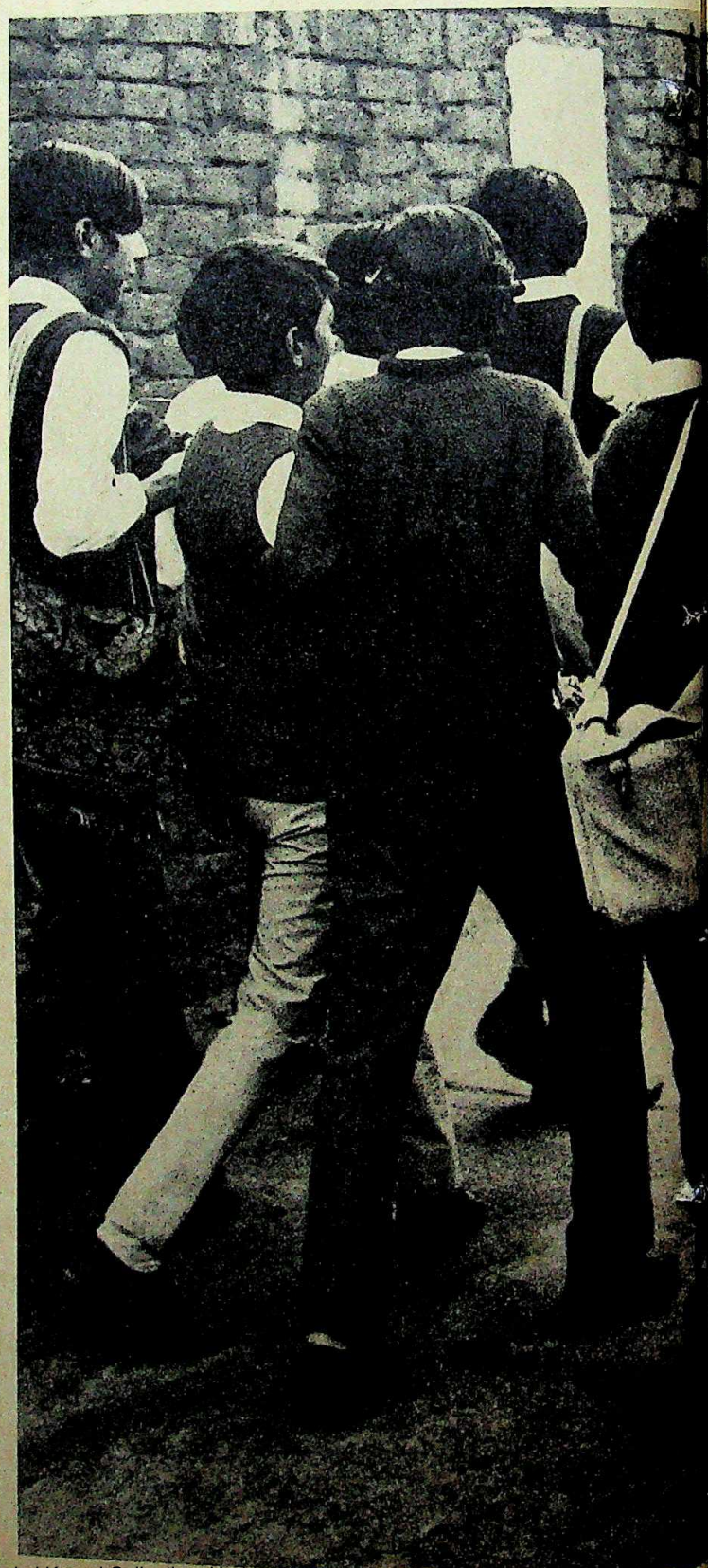
phenomenal advance according to a three-volume report put out by the World Bank recently is the care it has strategically taken of its children, regarding them as a major investment for the future. Its birthrate has dropped from approximately 38 per 1,000 to 18 per 1,000, while India's in the same period has altered from 38 per 1,000 to 35. In education, it has a primary school enrolment of 93 per cent against India's 64 per cent; 51 per cent at secondary school level compared to India's 28 per cent; the school drop-out rate is less than half that for India; and adult literacy is as high as 66 per cent, almost double the 36 per cent in India.

If this contrast conjured up a picture of an economically ravaged and war-stricken nation, the scale of the human loss involved might seem tangible. But India, boastful of its human resource, conscious of its ancient culture, assured of its position as a captain of industry and technology in the Third World, tinkering with the possibility of producing nuclear arms, playing host to international meets and capable of mounting spectacles to dazzle the world—what does it have to offer its own children?

In other words what is the country doing about its own future—for the blighted future of its children only means endangering the survival of its society. Whatever way the question is phrased, children can answer it—for themselves, for their country and its future. Because they remain not only the country's greatest asset but also the most telling barometer to record its ills and gains. Their perceptions count more than any other to gauge a truthful report on the state of the nation; their preoccupations, observations and beliefs are at all times a vital constant factor among other more valid variables. The home truths children have to tell are the most important to hang on to. And their situation the clearest index for judging ourselves.

Heightened Awareness: Whether the product of a privileged urban society or growing up in remote villages, whether deprived or handicapped or working in drudgery, whether starving, sick or pampered by affluence and opportunity, the growing awareness of Indian children is astonishing. How much they know and what they see may come as a revelation—everywhere in India hundreds of voices, breaking hesitantly into tones of adolescence pass a damning verdict on the perishing values of the system: they speak of political corruption, social disparity, violence, poverty and economic inequality. A professional teacher of 25 years' standing in Bombay says that the most marked change in her handling of children in the last decade has been "that they seem much less child-like than before".

Kalli, an 11-year-old girl in New Delhi explains to her father the reason why the mammoth government-owned Ashok Hotel was recently painted white. "So that," she says, "it will soon get dirty and have to be repainted and the politician can put money into his pocket." And in Kerala, 12-year-old Liza Ravi, daughter of state Home Minister Vayalar Ravi, lashes out with enviable candour under warning reproachful glares from her mother; she calls politicians "spineless bootlickers". All politicians, she says, are corrupt. "And all MLA's in Congress(I) want to be ministers and all ministers, including my father, want to be chief minister. They have never done anything good for the country. They are scheming night and day how to outsmart each other." Anup Lakhani, 15, the son of a businessman of Mysore, adds:



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The rich are bound to make money faster than the poor...see, if I have a small plot of land and the landlord has more land and cattle too, it is obvious that he can accumulate wealth faster.

—MOHANLAL, 17, Madhya Pradesh



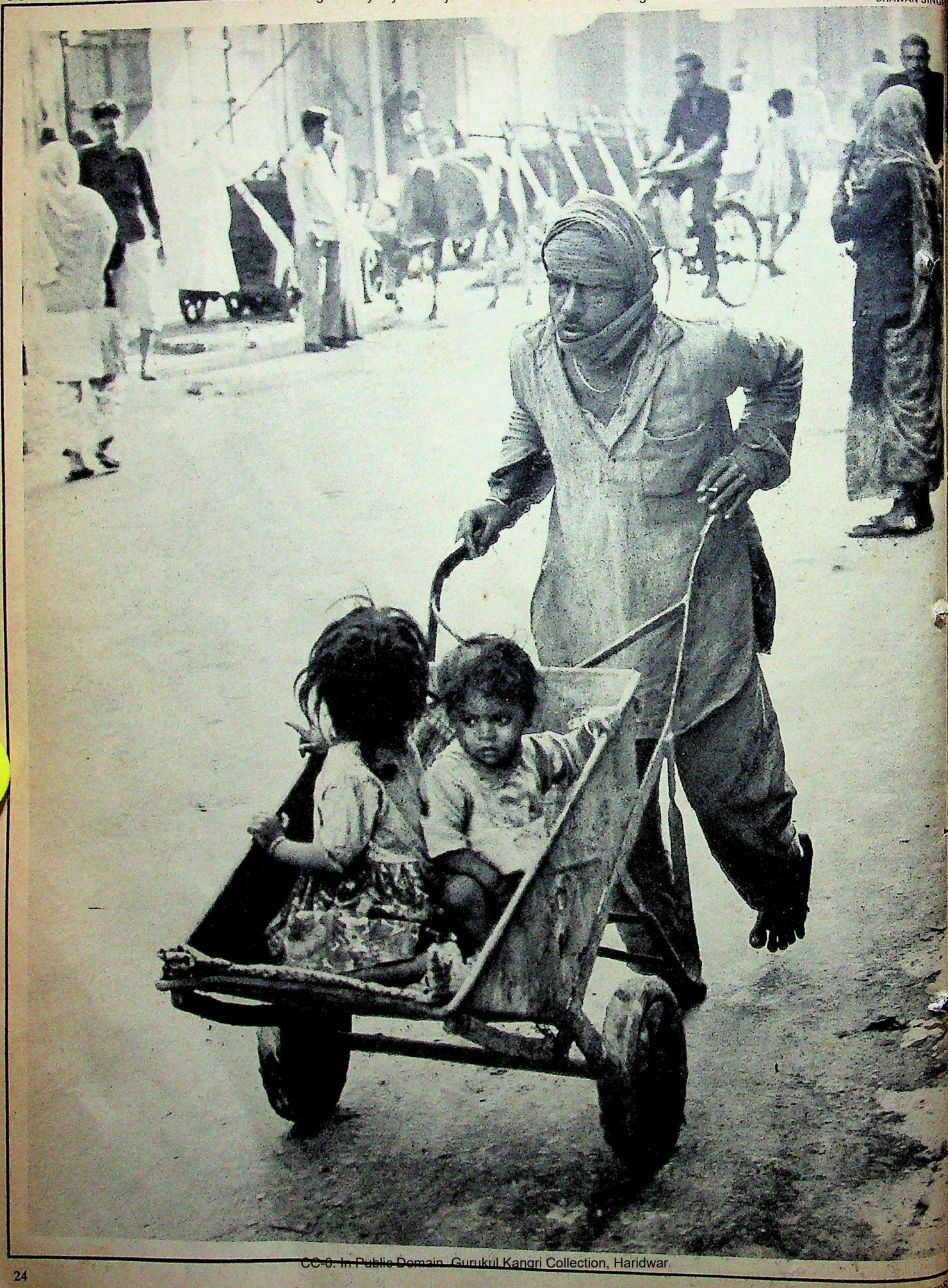
I wouldn't like to leave India. When you read books and all, you know that western people have no feelings for each other. No attachment. Here, even if you walk on the street, you can talk to anyone and make friends.

—SONALI MISHRA, 16, Bhopal

RAGHU RAI

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BHAWAN SINGH



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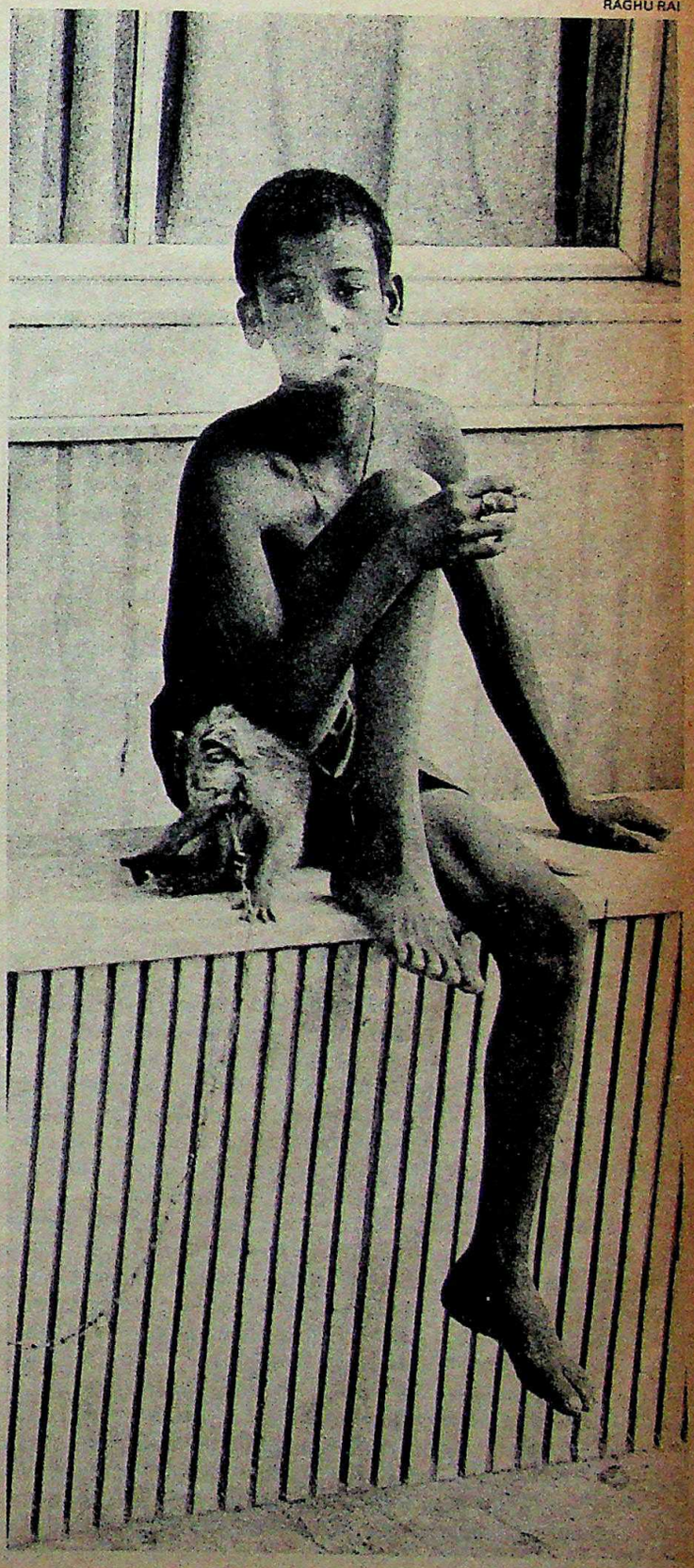




What's the use of teaching maths, science and social science when we can't earn our daily bread? It is just like teaching philosophy to a beggar who is having nothing in the stomach. Nowadays education is becoming a political instrument.

—RAJAGOPAL SRINIVASAN, 14, Bangalore

RAGHU RAI



"Politicians come only during elections. After that you don't see them again." The widespread interest Indian children display about politicians is only reflective of the country's obsessive interest in politics as a whole.

Bim Bissell, a New Delhi teacher who has run a popular pre-school called Playhouse since 1955 that judiciously combines laidback snobbery with solid good sense, says that in her play therapy classes toddlers between the ages of three and six keep clipping photographs of Mrs Gandhi out of newspapers as a major interest. Elsewhere, typically in a country of staggering variety, the knowledge of money, power and politics that according to Bissell grips the smallest of urban children, a child's predilections may differ.

Concerns: Asked if he had heard of Mrs Gandhi, Rajesh Kumar, 12, the son of a invalid father and a mother who works as a maidservant, said: "No. I know of some Gandhi who is bald and wears peculiar clothes and spectacles." Asked what he did at school he was yet more frank: "I go to school to play kabaddi. I copy in the examinations. Who cares? My first priority is to make money—one of these days I want to start a paan shop."

Concerns get insular as life gets harder. Rainu, a 15-year-old tribal boy in Hallwer village in Gadchiroli division of Maharashtra's Chandrapur district has no view of the country as a whole or even of his state. Though he attends a Lok Biradari Ashram school started by Baba Amte for tribal children—the first member of his tribe to do so—his world is confined to his tribal community of Madias. And his sense of want is apparent enough. "Life is not happy here. There is not enough food. There is no proper place to live. We do not get proper work—only casual labour. At home, I get some rice and sometimes vegetables to eat but no milk. In school we get roti, milk and dal thrice a day. But the Naxalites are trying to get us justice."

Deprivation of the basic necessities causes one kind of grievance. Physical disability causes another kind of maladjustment. Vijaya Dewadi Rao, a 15-year-old deaf mute now studying at a Pride India School in Andheri, abandoned his village in Andhra Pradesh to come to Bombay to attend a school for the handicapped in Bombay. He loathes the big city. "I was happier in the village—you could get sugarcane and climb coconut trees. After I learn to speak some more I want to go back to live in my village." Uprooted from his context, the boy pines for home. His only entertainment in the city is to go to the local liquor den where they let him watch television.

Rattan, 12, another deaf mute who is also hunchbacked and comes from the slums of Khar in Bombay, explained through gestures and in writing that life hadn't treated her as badly. Cheerful and optimistic, she manages to cook and make chapatis. Asked what she wanted to do when she grew up, her smile spread wide. After much gesticulation, it turned out that Rattan's chief ambition was to be able to wear a sari one day.

Small triumph it may be, but it matters most in one little girl's life. Pleasures for other children, affluent and privileged, get amazingly diverse. Well-heeled kids in metros like Delhi and Bombay have their lives evolving around videos and video games; they talk of parties, dowries, money and cars with an assurance born of belonging to the power elite. At a leading public school in the capital

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Some things I want to change but the I say, why should I struggle? Why should I only deserve the hardships o life after struggle?

—GAURAV WADHAWAN, 12, New Delhi



the brochure for the annual play collects advertisements for Rs 3 lakh; children compete with each other to arrive daily in foreign cars; and recently when a teacher borrowed a pen from his students, having forgotten his own, he was presented with a choice of expensive Parkers the following morning. Says Esther Dubey, a Bombay-based child psychologist of 20 years' standing who is also director of an institute for exceptional children: "Cultural activity in the old days didn't cost much whether it was learning music or art or developing your personality. Now with VCR's and TVs readily available children are not interested in applying themselves but in seeking fast and easy emotional gratification."

Gaurav Wadhawan, a smart-looking 12-year-old who is the son of a prosperous company executive in the capital, explained his point of view: "Some things I want to change, but then I say, why should I struggle? Why should I only deserve the hardships of life after struggle?" Asked if he would bribe a politician to get things done, he said: "Yes. Livelihood comes before what you learn in school." He had an equally sharp answer on issues such as poverty: "We are always being told to do something for the poor. But I'm sorry to tell you that very few children have adopted this practice—this has become a picture in a frame hanging on the wall."

Swift Perceptions: Other than mirroring the hypocrisies and double standards of life around them, Indian children are quickly developing the ability to detect the big lies in small ones. Bhargavi Srinivasan, 14, daughter of a chemicals consultant who studies in Class IX of St Anne's High School, Tarnaka, a Hyderabad suburb, says speaking of sale of examination papers: "What happens in schools is only an extension of things happening on a bigger scale. Look at NTR indulging in sadhu stunts and talking big. And Mrs Gandhi spending time and money endlessly on one conference after another and getting elected chairman because she is the host."Adds Tejinder Singh, also 14 and a student of Bombay's Cathedral School, summing up Bhargavi's feelings: "I am only proud of our history not of our present."

The cynicism is plainly apparent, especially among educated urban children, and it gives way to a certain righteousness. "It's only natural that children should have lost faith in social and political life—they perceive its hypocrisies easily," says Maithreyi Ramadurai, a well-known social worker in Madras. Though many may shed the righteousness as they become embroiled in the system eventually, they are made acutely conscious of deteriorating standards everywhere—at home and in school.

Over two decades ago, the report of the Education Commission pointed out that with the gradual disappearance of old values that held the social fabric together, the new disorganisation was evident in the growing lawlessness, disregard for public property, communal tension and student unrest. The new ethos is a result of, as Bombay-based editor Saryu Doshi says, "the way we bring up our children and what we teach them in schools". No national institution has suffered reverses as great as the downgrading of the educational establishment—though statistics claim that India now covers over 90 per cent of its villages with primary schools, education at higher levels is increasingly a hit-or-miss business. "We're teaching young people to cheat," says educationist Meena Swaminathan, "the system of education is such that what counts

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I am only proud of our history, not of our present.

—TEJINDER SINGH, 14, Bombay



I will never ask for dowry. But if I am marrying an industrialist's daughter and he gives me some things, I may accept it.

—VIGHNESH TRIVEDI, 14, Ahmedabad

RAGHU RAI

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Even if you are honest, people will not believe that you are straight. They'll say he must be up to something. He must be a smuggler.

—UMAKANT GUPTA, 13, Bhopal

is the marks you get, not your relationships nor a sense of teamwork and genuine effort." Extending her argument, noted commentator A.F.S. Talyarkhan adds: "What we now have in the country is the worship of mediocrity."

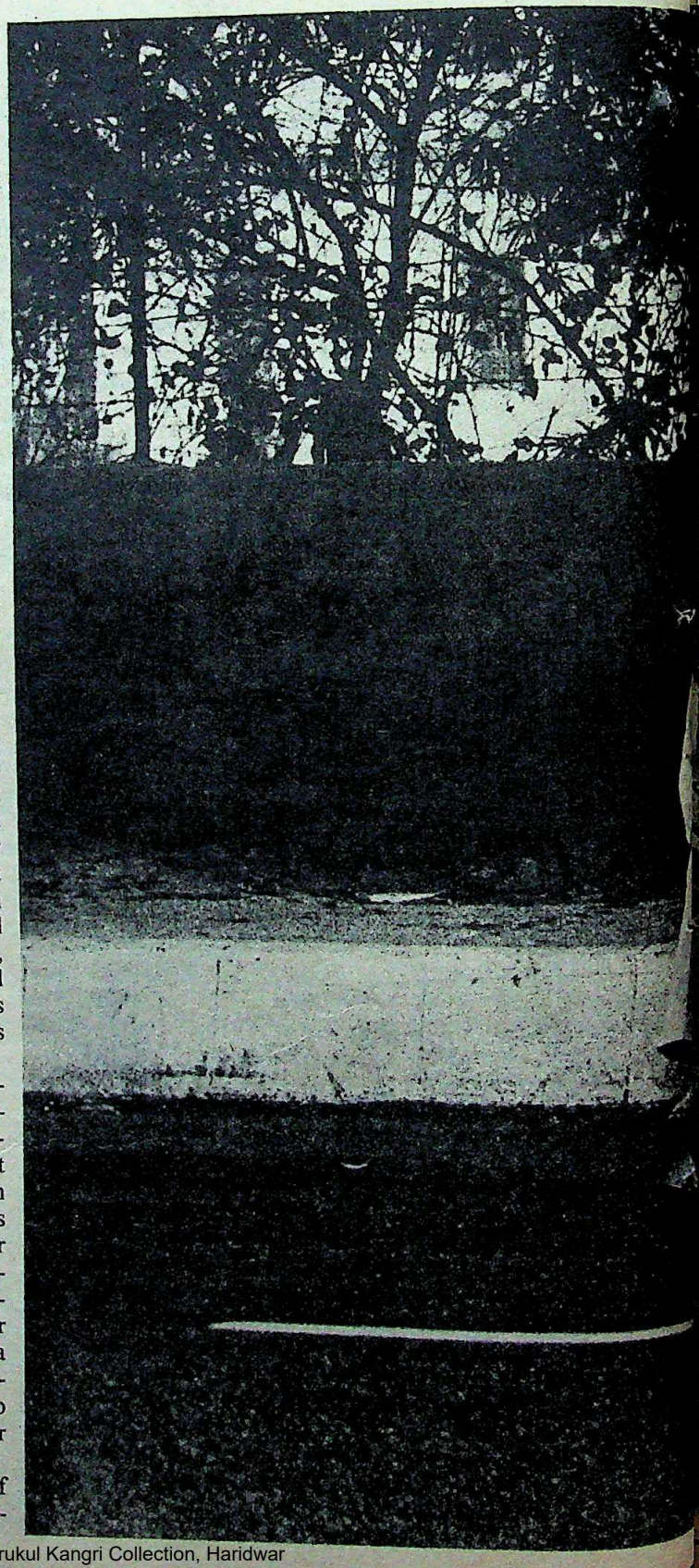
THE FRANTIC race for marks at school—one schoolboy interviewed rhymed it as "Just before exam, cram, cram, cram"—has now assumed the proportion of an unbeatable syndrome. Says child psychologist Esther Dubey: "The curriculum these days is so overloaded with subjects that there isn't any time for moral instruction." Adds Sudha Kini, an executive social worker for a reputed firm that runs child welfare set-ups in several Bombay slums: "In pre-Independence India salary scales for teachers may have been low but there was an honesty and dedication which is missing today."

Adverse Reactions: The disillusionment shows in reactions of children to school—most of them see the pointlessness of the education exercise and loathe it. Children speaking in the slums of Santa Cruz, Bombay, take up the issue effectively. Says Sabir Khan, 10-year-old son of a lorry driver who quit the government school he went to three years ago: "The teachers would write something on the board and go to sleep. They beat us if we did our work wrong." Gopika Gopal, 14, student of ninth class in a Trivandrum school is more vehement: "Money has finished the education system in Kerala. Everyone knows that even duds can buy an MBBS degree."

N. Rajendra, 12, of Hyderabad, is in the seventh class, and tells the story of how his teacher showed off his power: "When I was transferred from B Section to A Section one teacher did not give me good marks though I studied and wrote the tests well. But he gave me the marks I deserved after a few months as if to show his teaching was responsible for the difference which really wasn't there." And though most children deny that they have ever given in to any kind of communal feeling, the ugly religious and social divisions can make their way into the classroom. Says Aman Paul, 14, of Calcutta, a class nine student: "In our class the Muslim and Anglo-Indian boys are treated as a separate category. The others call them names and they are very lonely. They don't hit back as that will make the situation even worse for them."

One reason why today's children sense growing disillusionment is because they have lost their heroes. Other than the standard names like Mahatma Gandhi, Subhash Chandra Bose, Rabindranath Tagore that they will parrot because they have learnt them at school, closer questioning reveals few idols children can look up to. Says Dipankar Sarkar, who has taught at Calcutta's Patha Bhavan School for the past 15 years: "There is a greater sense of mistrust among today's children. They really feel that society will not stand by them, that they will be left to fend for themselves. Our national heroes have largely become irrelevant for them." Biswaranjan Sen, 15, of St Xavier's School, Calcutta, a technocrat's son, echoes Sarkar's impression when he categorically says: "I don't see anybody who can be emulated wholly or who can inspire me to any great extent. My parents may have their idols among politicians but I have none."

Theories: It is not therefore surprising what the majority of Indian children feel about their country as a whole. While the un-



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I will never give bribes if I can help it. I do not really know. I may be forced to give it, but even if I do it would be a wrong thing to do.

—SANDEEP PODUVAL, 14, Ahmedabad



Whether India will become better depends on the politicians. It depends on the leaders. It depends on the honesty of the leaders. If they rule efficiently it will certainly be a better place.

—SONALI JOSHI, 12, New Delhi

RAGHU RAI



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People are basically lazy, they won't work. We are simply not as hardy as the Americans or the Japanese.

—ASHOK KUMAR RAJRISHI, 12, Patna

derlying feeling of patriotism is strong, and an broadened world view has reduced the mindless aping of the West, children are given these days to drawing basic international comparisons. Says Ashok Kumar Rajrishi, a 14-year-old schoolboy of Patna who comes from a backward class: "People are basically lazy, they won't work. We are simply not as hardy as the Americans or the Japanese."

They are also clued up on disparities of money and class. Harkesh Kumar, 16, whose invalid father was a labourer in Delhi and who is now studying commercial photography, gives his version of why benefits won't percolate to the bottom: "The Government may take some good steps but the lower classes don't benefit from them because the middle classes know what the Government is doing, so it takes advantage of these measures before the poor can. Only when the goods are looted do we know that they were meant for the poor."

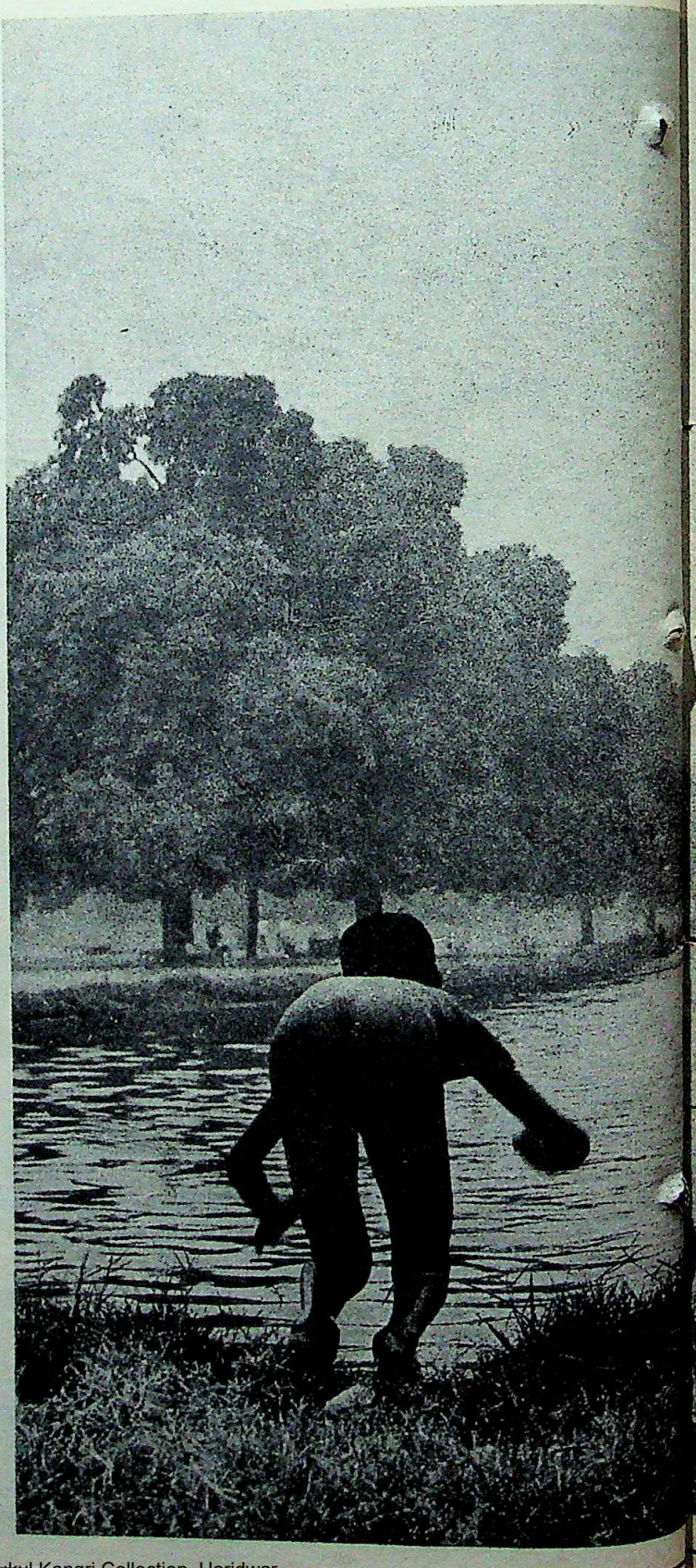
Asked what he would do if he were prime minister, he offered the kind of sane, judicious advice that is sorely wanted in running the Government. He said: "To raise the country it is not enough for poverty to be removed. It is necessary that things like Asiad are held. Abroad, this is how a country's greatness is known. That is why we must also have stadiums. But not to the point where people are dying of hunger and Mrs Gandhi is taking loans from outside and building stadiums. Then she loads that expense onto the poor and raises taxes..."

Easily the most heartening aspect of speaking to hundreds of Indian children is their passionate love for India. Aware of the escalating ills of society, young voices repeatedly preface their criticisms with "It is a good country", "I enjoy living here", "My village is a good place". Anup Lakhani, the businessman's son from Mysore with strong opinions about politicians studied briefly in London before returning to Mysore. He says of India: "It's a nicer country to live in. Like England it's a busy place but calm. London was a real stuck up place. Everything was closed to you. Here, everything is open."

In their aspirations for India are reflected their dreams for themselves. Few speak of leaving their country, and fewer believe in its disintegration. However detailed their knowledge of why and how things are going wrong, it is buttressed by an exuberant awareness of roots. "India will not disintegrate," says Kaustav Gupta, 16, a Calcutta schoolboy from a solid middle class background—both his parents work—who wants to be a nuclear scientist when he grows up, "Our people know how to stand together at any major point of crisis."

Adds Avani Hirway, 12, a middle class child in Ahmedabad: "I am very proud of India, especially its cultural heritage. India is my motherland. I would not leave it even for the sake of money." Hirway wants to be a doctor and serve the rural poor. Naina Ananthaswamy, also 12, from Madras feels much the same: "I want to become a biophysicist, to learn about animals and save the country. In India cattle are dying of diseases. You can study these diseases and prevent them from dying. If I go to a foreign country, I will study and come back to help my country in science."

Nine-year-old Raghava Desiman of Madras wants to grow up to be an engineer so that "I can make things cheaper for poor people. I just want to earn Rs 1,000 a month. Only because most



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There is still something for you to do here. You can do something for yourself. It's like exploring the unknown.

—SAMEER BALIGA, 15, Bangalore



I go to school to play kabaddi. I copy in the examinations. Who cares? My first priority is to make money.

—RAJESH KUMAR, 12, Bombay

BHAWAN SINGH



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Q. What would you do if you became a politician?
A. I would also make speeches.
—AGYA RAM, 13, New Delhi



RAGHU RAI



RAGHU RAI



people work for money is our country not improving." Prabha Kumari, 12, of Patna, wants to join the IAS to "fight against corruption. If I become an IAS officer I will set an example for others."

Less privileged children are less confident about what they want to do. The uncertainties of their present make their view of things to come murky and despairing. Gauri Shankar Chaudhury, 16, a tenth class student of Patna Collegiate High School whose father is a landless labourer has no ambitions for himself. "I just want to be able to earn my bread," he says, cautiously adding about the country: "I cannot tell you exactly what its future will be as I do not know my own future. I will only be able to do something for the country if I am able to survive."

The reaction is fairly characteristic of a child from a less privileged background—the bleakness of comments collected from remote rural areas where over 75 per cent that is, nearly 200 million children live, indicate sadly narrow concerns: food is the major preoccupation. The idea of feeding three times a day remains a life-and-death issue.

Crucial State: Like Gauri Shankar, the children see their survival inextricably linked with that of India. They may not pursue the line of thinking for long. The surviving social and political ills may change their view unalterably. Buoyant idealism may give way to the laws of the contemporary jungle. Says a child psychologist in Bangalore: "Despite the fact that most children express a desire to change things, it's not certain they will stay righteous when they grow up. Few continue to feel that way by the time they reach 20 as they become more realistic as they find life difficult to cope with. They are forced into conforming more and more, willing to bend rules because they aren't hopeful of changing them at all."

If India is to keep that tryst with destiny after all, and a better destiny than the one marked out so far by the politicians, tomorrow's generation will have to bear more than its share of responsibilities. Sameer Baliga, the 15-year-old son of a highly-paid Bangalore executive, has no doubt that he, for one, is ready for the challenge: "Thee is still something that is left for you to do here. You can do something for yourself. It's like exploring the unknown."

It's more than just exploring the unknown, it also means vanquishing the known, the corruption, the money power and the influence that put a heavy premium on honesty, the social roadblocks such as the octopus-like caste system and the second class status of women. It means purging one generation's tarnished legacy and putting a clean new edifice in its place. In the fable of the emperor's new clothes, the monarch went his regal way ignoring the child's voice from the back of the crowd that cried, "But he has nothing on!" This story must have a better ending.

This story was written by SUNIL SETHI and JAGANNATH DUBASHI on the basis of reports filed on conversations with children by a dozen INDIA TODAY correspondents all over the country.

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CONTEMPORARY STYLING HA



THE DOUBLE-BREASTED SUIT COMES INTO ITS OWN

Fashion comes full circle with a return to traditional elegance. The look is formal but never stuffy. This double-breasted suit in a deep navy blue with neat pin-stripes sets the trend. The jacket is impeccably tailored but not self-conscious while the contrasting white shi is correctly conservative. The fabric? Raymond's. Perfectly fashioned for th occasion.

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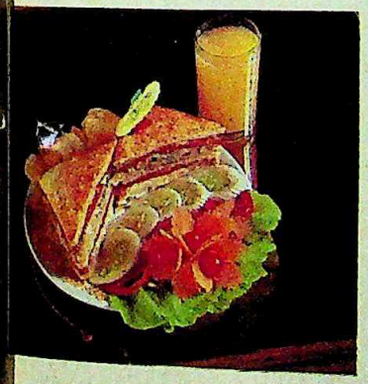
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FASHION GUIDE

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Do you suffer from executive indigestion? A simple preventive measure: eat light. Cut down on spicy, fatty and starchy foods. Restrict tea and coffee to 2 cups a day. Drink lots of water — it flushes out toxins from your system.



BELT UP

The leather belt comes into focus, in colours keyed harmoniously to the trouser. Belts are narrow — between 2.5 to 3.8 cms. wide — and always in the finest, pure leather.





RINGS AND THINGS...

When it comes to jewellery, less is more. And real is best. A gold signet ring is perfectly in place. Silver bracelets which proclaim your identity are strictly for casual wear.

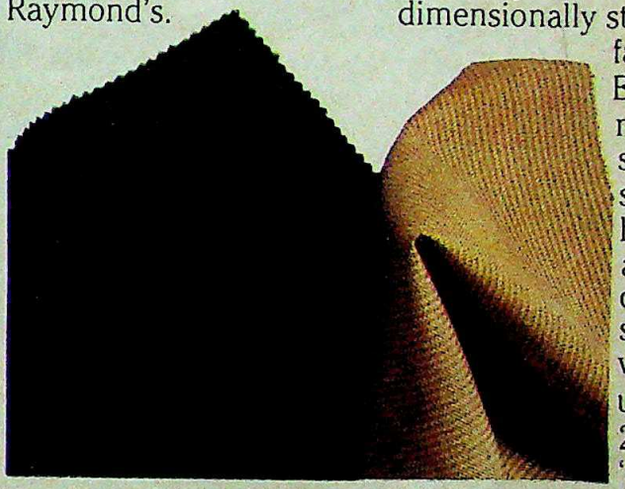


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REVIEW

Vicious Paradoxes

New Delhi, December 15, 1983: *The Steel Authority of India (SAIL) is incurring a daily loss of Rs 1 crore, Steel and Mines Minister N.K.P. Salve told Rajya Sabha today.*

According to the minister, the main reasons for the loss were: high opening inventory of saleable steel, shortfall in production due to low availability of power and coal, lower offtake of steel, particularly from large buyers, increase in the prices of various inputs and increased interest burden.



THIS is as telling a commentary as any on the state of affairs in the country during most of last year. The news item was tucked away in the middle pages of a financial newspaper and did not say whether the ministerial reply in Parliament had attracted any attention. Apparently it did not. There were no supplementaries as to why a premier industrial unit—the largest engineering unit in the country with sales of well over Rs 2,000 crore—should incur a loss of Rs 1 crore a day and what the Government was doing about it. The members seemed to be more concerned with Sant Longowal's letter to CHOGM delegates, religious conversions in Ramnathapuram and the number of Naga rebels that had crossed over into Burma during the last three years (400).

1983 was a year of paradoxes, each paradox fitting neatly, like a Chinese set of boxes, into another. Why are public sector units making such heavy losses while new private companies—and old ones—are clamouring for funds for expansion and diversification? Why did the prices of inputs rise if, as the Government claims, the economy is still in the grip of recession and there are few buyers for steel? And why should the recession continue in the face of a record bumper harvest? Nobody apparently raised these questions and the minister did not oblige with replies. Possibly there are no replies for a paradox can be explained only in terms of another which is no explanation at all.

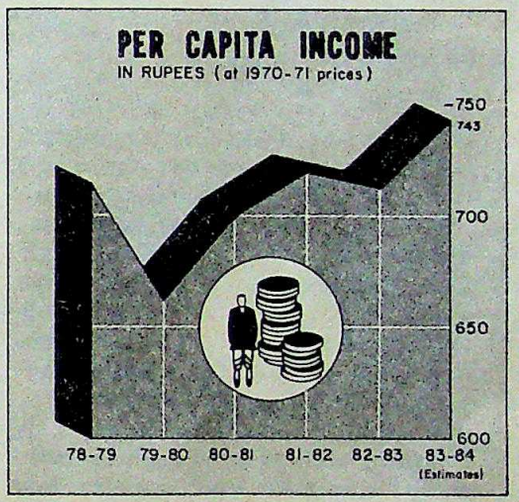
Firstly, the facts. Although Planning Minister S.B. Chavan said recently that he was looking forward to a rate of growth of GNP of 6 per cent to 6.5 per cent this year—nearly twice the average during the last four or five years—things are not as bright as that figure would indicate. Briefly, the facts are as follows:

► Foodgrain production is likely to be around 145 million tonnes.

► Industrial production (up to August) has been running at a level of 3.9 per cent above last year.

► There are severe bottlenecks in what is known as infrastructure: coal, power and rail transport. Coal production is so far only about 2 per cent more than last year but might increase to 5 per cent by the end of the year; power is unlikely to go higher than 3 per cent and the rail traffic so far is 2 per cent lower than last year.

► Exports are about 10 per cent higher



and imports are down, also by about 10 per cent. But these are preliminary figures covering only the last five months and a lot can happen before the year is out. But it does seem that the tight rein on imports is likely to bring down the trade gap by 25 to 30 per cent below last year's figure of Rs 5,500 crore.

► Foreign exchange assets—not reserves—have gone up by about 45 per cent between December 1982 and December 1983.

► Wholesale prices are 9.2 per cent higher than last year on point to point basis. Last year everyone thought that the Government had inflation licked but apparently not.

The situation makes little sense but then nothing in India makes sense unless it is seen as a part of a great big jigsaw puzzle. And then the light at the end of the tunnel can be seen.

Marginal Growth: Confronted by a mass of figures, it's hard to realise that inflation can hide many sins. A long period of stagnation can come to life when prices start rising, but the growth is apt to be illusory. Foodgrain production has been going up and down over the years and the record crop this year has come as something of a bonanza. But the average yearly rate of growth has been no more than 2 per cent, barely above the population growth rate. The net result is that improvement in real incomes has been marginal. For instance, per capita income in 1982–83 (Rs 713) was actually less in real terms than the per capita income in 1978–79 (Rs 716). It means that time has stood still for about five long years, a period of stagnation, that must be making mincemeat of the best laid plans of mice and men. This was not an exception, either. It has been happening continually since 1970–71, and no doubt before that. Per capita real income in 1974–75 was less than that in 1970–71 (again a five-year period) and the income in 1979–80 was just about the same as in 1975–76 (also a five-year period). The Indian economy seems to go into a kind of a trance during such five-year periods during which everything goes topsy-turvy. We are obviously at the starting point of such a period now and though the per capita income has shot up this year to Rs 742, wholly as a result of the bumper harvest, things will almost certainly begin to slide down again, unless, and it is a big unless, the planners can stop such periodical—and regular—slide-backs.

When farm income is adjusted for prices of manufacturers, the rot in the situation becomes all too apparent. In 1978–79, total income in the farm sector was Rs 18,555 crore. It came down to Rs 14,494 crore a year later and to Rs 15,688 crore in 1980–81. It picked up to Rs 17,407 crore in 1981–82 but was still lower than in 1978–79. In 1982–83 it may have drawn level with the income of 1978–79 but the fact remains that throughout this period, which was marked by only one year of drought, the purchasing power in the farm sector was consistently falling. In other words, as S. Roy says in his excellent article in *The Economic Times* (December 16, 1983), the capacity of the agricultural sector to purchase manufactured goods had been steadily going down. This is what the recession in industry is all about; it was not brought on by the credit squeeze by the Reserve Bank or the high interest rates. The squeeze in credit and the high interest rates were deliberate attempts to keep the demand closer to the real level. The real demand for industrial goods has not been growing at all for the last five years, except perhaps that portion which arises from within the industry itself.

Demand Slump: The second bottleneck arises from the investment in the public sector. During 1980–81 and 1981–82, annual public sector outlays were Rs 14,700 crore and Rs 17,500 crore respectively, an increase of 18 per cent. But in real terms, there was actually a fall in investment as prices rose by 18 per cent and 9 per cent during those years. The net result was a continuing fall in real demand accentuated by shortfalls in real investment. It has been a vicious circle, and the heart of the circle is the virtually stagnant farm sector.

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TRENDS

Drifting Away

SINCE governments take credit when things are going right—finance ministers shout from roof-tops when the price index drops a decimal point—they should also take the blame when things get out of hand. And everything seems to have gone out of control in 1983, from near runaway inflation nudging two-digit levels to virtual stagnation in industrial growth.

Out of control, perhaps, but not yet quite out of hand. The economy, to all appearances, has behaved as normally as it always does. Some things are up and some things are down but it has been, by and large, an ordinary average year. If the gross national product (GNP) seems to have gathered some speed at 6 per cent, that is because of the expected bumper harvest of 145 million tonnes which is actually below the Planning Commission's old target but sounds extraordinarily bountiful because of the poor crop in the previous year. Had it been otherwise, the commission would have had to pack up and go home, for nothing much would have remained of the plan except the unsold copies.

Out of the 12 crucial items on the list, the economic managers can get good marks for only two, crude oil and cement, where there is noticeable forward movement. On most other fronts, there is movement in the other direction, and try as they may, the managers seem incapable of stopping the drift. Herewith a quick run over the check-list.

Industry

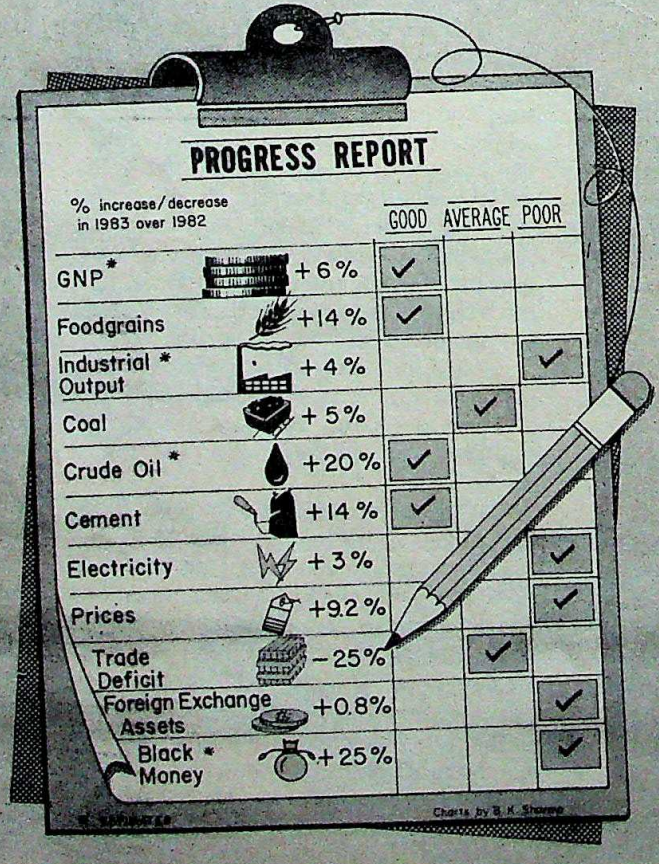
1983 is closing with an industrial growth rate of no more than 4 per cent which is almost exactly the same as last year's rate. The excuse then was that recession was a global phenomenon and had affected India also. Is there a recession this year or not? With a bumper harvest in hand, there should have been no complaints about demand but the complaints persist, particularly in such core sectors as steel and aluminium. But the reasons for the slowdown are to be found mainly on the supply side. Coal production was to go up from 130 million tonnes to 142 million tonnes or by 10 per cent, but growth so far has been very slack, no more than a bare 2 per cent. The same is the case in power and transport. The growth rate of power is less than half of what it was this time last year and despite a good monsoon, there are power cuts in most states. The railways are going backwards, literally. They carried up to September less traffic than they did last year, not because there was breakdown on the railways but traffic was just not forthcoming. Goods traffic is now being increasingly diverted to roadways and the railways are getting into the red. A foundry in Ropar gets its sand from Varanasi by road, for it just doesn't have the patience to cope with the waywardness of the railways.

Prices

1982-83 was a poor year for the crops but a good year for the consumer, nonetheless: prices went up by less than 3 per cent. 1983-84 couldn't have been better as far as the farm sector is concerned but prices have been under pressure throughout the year and may touch the double-digit level by the time the year is out. Surprisingly, foodgrain prices have risen the most and so have prices of industrial goods based on farm products. Even sugar, of which there is a glut, is being sold at more than double the price ruling five years ago when, too, there was a glut. This doesn't make sense if you analyse the situation in plain demand-supply terms, but published figures are one thing and unpublished are another and the twain somehow don't meet. This brings us to the last item on the check-list—black money.

Black Money

Black was beautiful as long as there was not too much of it. Once it crosses a certain limit, it colours everything it touches with its dark shade and things are not what they seem. According to a study by a staff member of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), India heads the list of countries with black money. It now accounts for something like 50 per cent of the national income, whereas it may vary from 10 per cent in the US to about 30 per cent in Italy. These are guesses, of course; if black money can be counted to the last rupee, it can't remain black any more. If 50 per cent is anywhere near the truth, every other currency note you see is black and must be affecting the economy, though it does not figure in government statistics. Earlier reports indicated that the underground economy could not have been bigger than, say, 15 or 20 per cent of GNP. If it is as large as 50 per cent, a good deal of discussion about resources and prices and production becomes academic, for there are obviously forces at work that are outside the ken of the Government and its managers.



Foreign Exchange

The current year is the last full year in which the balance of the IMF loan will be received. Next year (1984-85) some foreign exchange will accrue in the first part of the year, but repayments will begin in the latter part. Thereafter, repayments along with interest will be due every year until 1990. Will India be able to afford such heavy repayments year after year, when the trade deficit continues to run high, as it is doing this year also. This is a 64,000-dollar question which, along with the growing but unseen impact of black money, will determine what shape the economy takes in the coming years. To that extent, 1983-84 is a watershed year, the last year when things were normal or were not abnormal, for nothing that comes after it can be anything like what it has been so far. India can't say that it was not warned.

—JAY DUBASHI

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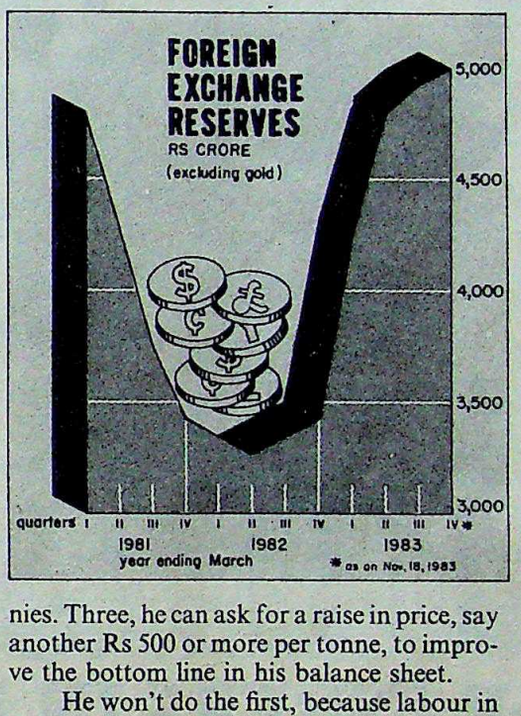
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It is astonishing that this should be happening at a time of rising savings as well as rising availability of foreign exchange. There is increasing evidence that there is no shortage of investible resources, in other words, capital. The term-lending institutions are flooded with applications for money from companies, and the figures are large. It is reported that the institutions have received applications for Rs 1,800 crore and further applications are on the way. The total cost of projects involved is said to be something like Rs 2,500 crore, which must be a record.

The question that arises is: why are private investors so keen to invest money in new projects—as well as in expansion and diversification of existing areas of business—when there is a noticeable slow-down in industrial demand, when investment in public sector power and energy projects is faltering, and when there is considerable industrial capacity lying idle? It is not an easy question to answer. All that can be said is that hope springs eternal in the human breast—entrepreneurship is after all made up of one part hope, one part luck and the rest everything else including capital—and there is a general feeling that things will eventually sort themselves out, and all will be well. That too is a paradox, but there it is.

Escalating Prices: Now, to prices. Why are prices rising despite a good harvest? Prices are rising because of the rising budget deficits, year after year, and as long as these continue, prices will keep shooting up. The Government doesn't really have much of a choice as there is an inherent conflict between stimulating industrial growth—through budget deficits, that is, printed money—and trying to hold down the deficits and import surpluses. The only way this can be done is by increasing money supply and this is why prices are rising despite the good kharif crop. Those who explain that prices are going up because money supply is going up are pointing at only one side of the coin. Why is money supply going up? It is not going up—it is being deliberately pushed up as without money and in the absence of a rise in real demand, as explained earlier, the Government will have to put up with deepening recession and that simply will not do. Recession and votes do not go together; that is why, most governments in the West try to reflate the economy at the time of elections. Even President Reagan, a bitter foe of deficit financing if ever there was one, is planning a sharp increase in his budget deficit this year, though it is opposed by his economic advisers. Economists come a dime a dozen; votes don't.

But deficits and surpluses are the type of Keynesian solutions that bureaucrats and government economists love as they give the impression that the Government is at last doing something, even if in the long term it is a wrong thing to do. (This is what Keynes meant when he said that in the long run, we are all dead, so why worry?) What will N.K.P. Salve do in the face of a Rs 1 crore daily loss in SAIL? One, he can shut down the losing steel mills, retrench labour and managers and ask top management to stop production until the inventories are brought down to a reasonable level. Two, he can sell the unit or units to, say, Tatas, who are doing a much better job of it than his managers are doing. This is what Mrs Thatcher is doing in England with her ailing government compa-



nies. Three, he can ask for a raise in price, say another Rs 500 or more per tonne, to improve the bottom line in his balance sheet.

He won't do the first, because labour in this country cannot be fired. He won't do the second, for that requires political courage of a kind that few politicians in this country possess. He will opt for the third alternative, for that is the easy way out. Public sector units have been doing it time and time again, almost as a matter of ritual. Salve will get his higher prices, the balance sheet will look quite respectable and the Finance Ministry will announce that SAIL has turned the corner and is once again in the black. Nothing really will have changed. Another two or three years, and the ritual will be repeated, if not by Salve, by someone else who may, however, have to announce that SAIL is losing Rs 2 crore a day, which it will almost certainly be doing by that time.

Dependable Institutions: And when there's trouble ahead, there is always the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to bail you out. Reports that a senior vice-president of the Bank saw Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee last week and the latter asked for a sizeable increase in assistance from the Bank have become such routine affairs that one almost takes them for granted. This time, of course, there is the question of the IMF loan which will soon come to an end with its last disbursement due sometime early next year (1984–85). Between now and 1990, India will have to repay the principal as well as the interest due on the loan. The instalments will begin next year. Will India be able to turn the deficit on external account into a surplus? With remittances from the Gulf declining and the non-resident investment scheme not working as vigorously as it was supposed to do, the burden would appear to fall on exports. But exports are not doing all that well, though they may improve. On the other hand, with the substantial improvement on the oil front, imports may stabilise around a low level, though that seems unlikely at the moment. How then will India tackle the coming crisis?

It is a question that many foreigners must be asking, and some of them are coming up with answers of their own. Chase Econometrics, a Philadelphia-based firm of forecasters, has come with a scenario that sounds too good to be true. According to Chase, India's annual growth is likely to accelerate over the next five years to 3.6 per cent, a sharp improvement on the 2.9 per cent of the previous five years. Imports will go up to 8 per cent a year (instead of 11 per cent in the last five years) and exports by 9.6 per cent a year (instead of 6.6 per cent), and the trade deficit will rise only marginally.

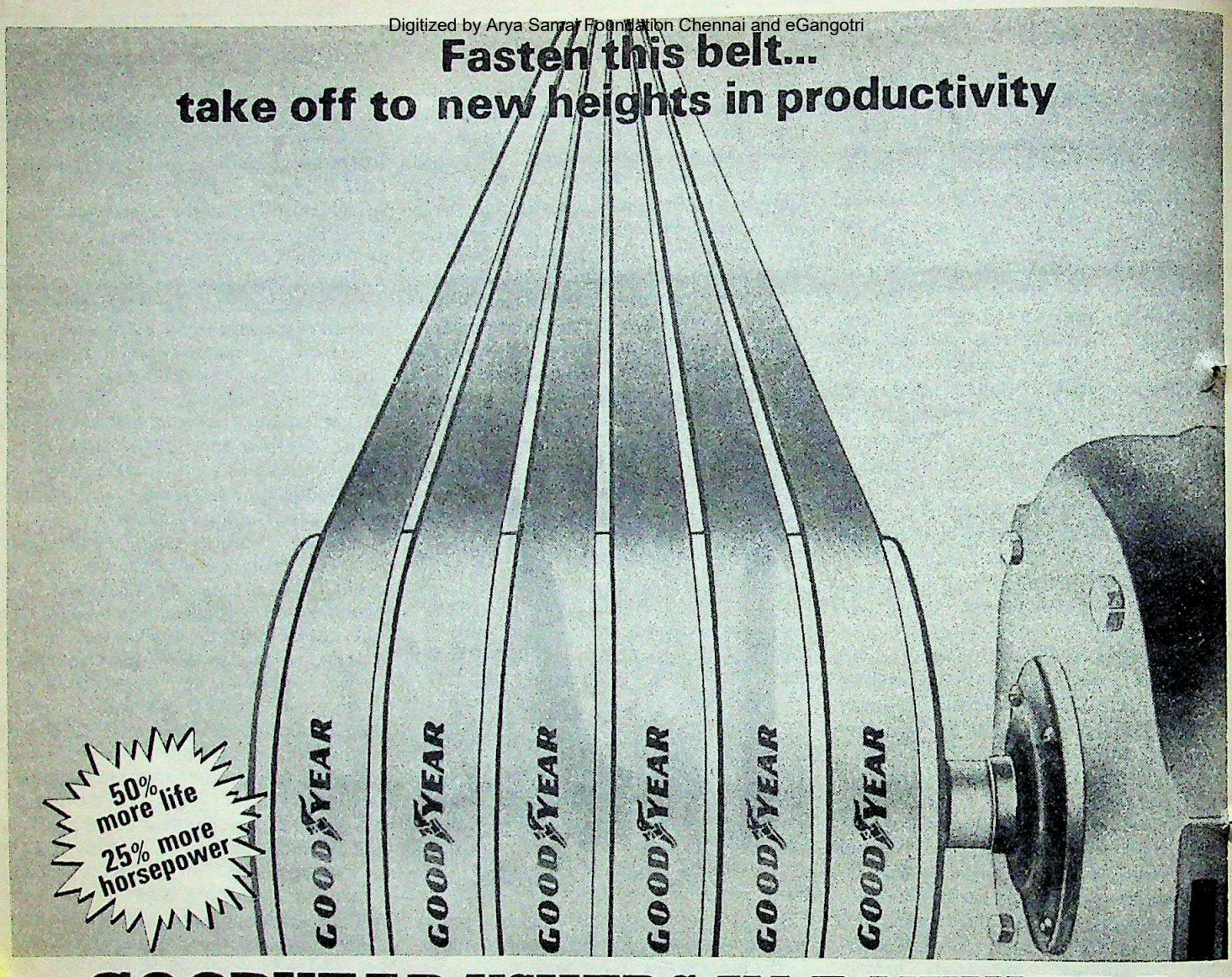
Rising Debts: However, India will have to cope with a sharp increase in what it pays out in debt servicing, especially from 1985–86 onwards, when the IMF repayments begin. One consequence of the rising debt servicing is that New Delhi will have to keep borrowing in a bid to roll over obligations. Chase sees total debt rising from Rs 23,500 crore at the end of this fiscal year to Rs 30,400 crore by 1988–89. This is not such a big jump and can be taken in its stride by keeping imports low and, of course, by going in for short-term loans for servicing the debt.

Agricultural output will go up by just over 3 per cent a year and industrial production by 5.4 per cent (instead of 2 per cent and 5 per cent since 1978). In other words, improvements will be marginal except in agriculture where a 50 per cent jump is indicated. But the increases may not make a striking difference and there will be no great breakthroughs. At the end of the next five years, India will be more or less the same as it is today, though perhaps a little more self-reliant (fewer imports and larger exports as a percentage of national income) and less dependent on foreign aid agencies. If this is what the computers in Washington and Philadelphia are predicting good luck to them. For the first time, it seems, the world is more hopeful about India than India is of itself, which makes for a nice change.

—JAY DUBASHI

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the world's best known Ayurvedic tonic reveals some startling facts to you

Chyawanprash— the 3000 year old health tonic

It is believed that Chyawanprash was first made 3000 years ago by the physicians of the Gods, for Chyawan Rishi.



Its powers were so amazing that the rishis began calling it 'the elixir of life'. They believed that it built up resistance, kept body tissues young and the mind alert and active.

Dabur recreates the secret recipe of the rishis

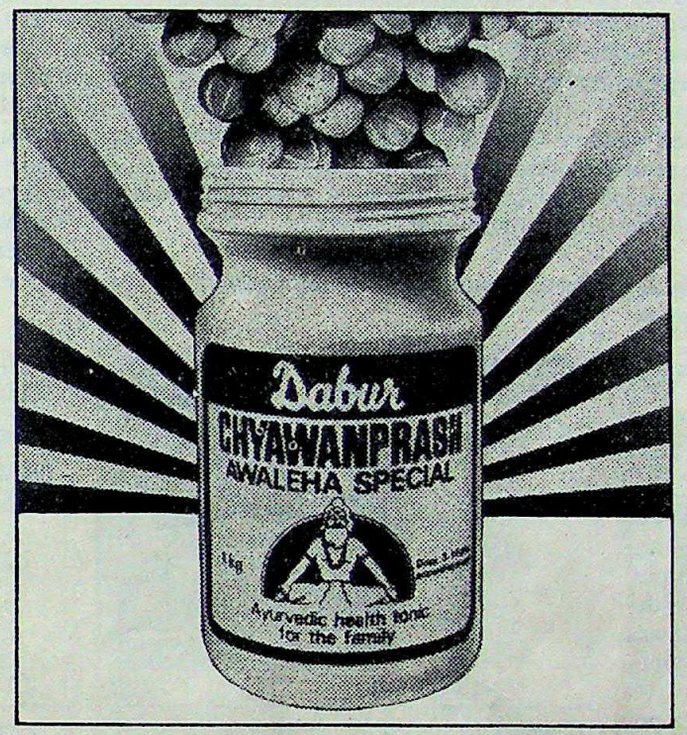
Chyawanprash remained a secret of the rishis for centuries, till Dabur set up their first Ayurvedic plant decades ago.

Dabur Chyawanprash today is made in a highly automated plant, with more than 40 natural ingredients. The most important of these is fresh amla. It also contains dashmool and ashtwarg.

Amla juice has 20 times more vitamin C than orange juice

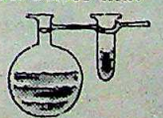
The early vaidyas first discovered that amla is nature's best defence against illness. Modern science has confirmed this. It has shown that amla is the richest known source of vitamin C.





Vitamin C does more for you than just prevent colds

Dr. Linus Pauling, twice winner of the Nobel Prize, made an amazing discovery which shattered the common belief that



vitamin C just prevents colds. He found that vitamin C revitalizes body tissues and slows down the aging process. It also builds up your natural resistance to coughs and other common ailments.

Dr. Pauling says, "Our bodies can fight disease effectively only when we have in our organs and body fluids enough vitamin C to enable our natural protective mechanisms to operate effectively".

You need a natural tonic even if you're healthy

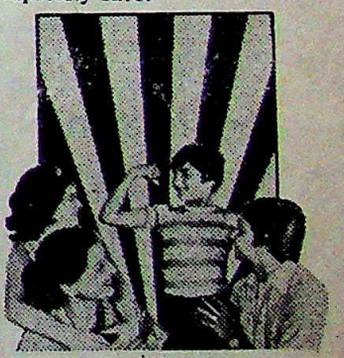
Far too many people believe that a health tonic is meant only for those who are sick. But as Ayurveda has always advocated, prevention is better than cure. So you need a natural health tonic which acts as a preventive.

Dabur Chyawanprash builds up your family's resistance to many diseases and helps to keep your whole family healthy. That's why it should be taken by everyone in the family.

A natural health tonic is better for your family

A natural health tonic like Dabur Chyawanprash gives you vitamins and minerals in their natural form, so they are easily absorbed by your body. Dabur Chyawanprash tones up your muscles and helps in the growth of tissues, it helps to fully utilize the proteins in the body; it keeps you active and full of energy.

And because Dabur Chyawanprash has no chemicals or artificial additives, it is free from side effects and is completely safe.



Dabur
CHYAWANPRASH
Your family's natural health tonic

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In its 100th year, Dabur has a fantastic offer for you, on selected Dabur products.

Whenever you buy one of these products, keep the cap in safe custody. You'll find a symbol and a slogan on the caps— '100 Years of Caring' (Indicated here). This symbol and slogan on the caps will be in three colours. The caps with black colour are worth 50 paise. The blue ones are worth one rupee and the red ones are worth two rupees. For Dabur Chyawanprash, the printed foil seal inside, functions as the cap. Rememeber, the colour of the symbol will tell you the value. And of course, only caps/foil seals with the printing of the centenary symbol— '100 Years of Caring'— will be valid for this offer.

Once you've collected a sufficient number of caps/foil seals, you can go to any Dabur dealer and redeem them for any Dabur product of equivalent amount. Free. So start collecting the centenary caps. Now. For more details and terms on this unique offer contact your nearest Dabur dealer.

Hurry! Offer extended upto 31st March, 1984.

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INDIA TODAY-MARG BAROMETER

Political Pointers

Over three years ago (in September 1980), INDIA TODAY decided to undertake an opinion poll in Delhi and 15 state capitals. Since September 1980, a number of such polls have been carried out, the last one appearing in June 1982.

The purpose of these polls was to obtain a feedback on the public opinion in 16 key cities of India. While these cities do not represent Indian public opinion as a whole, they do provide an indication of the mood (and the changes in it) of the more volatile and informed sections of the voting public.

Thus, in December 1983, INDIA TODAY commissioned Marketing And Research Group (MARG), a leading independent market research agency, to conduct this opinion poll.

During this poll, a total of 5,715 electors were interviewed in 14 cities (Gauhati and Chandigarh could not be covered due to unsettled conditions).

The cities covered were:

North: Delhi, Lucknow, Jaipur, Jammu (the winter capital of Jammu & Kashmir)
South: Madras, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Trivandrum
East: Calcutta, Patna, Bhubaneswar
West: Bombay, Ahmedabad, Bhopal

MRS GANDHI'S STANDING

The MARG-INDIA TODAY poll shows that Mrs Gandhi's popularity (those satisfied with her minus those dissatisfied) continues unabated. In fact, compared with the last poll in June 1982, her popularity is now considerably higher—perhaps because the poll was undertaken very soon after the widely-publicised CHOGM summit.

In only one city, Jaipur, do her opponents clearly outnumber her supporters. In Ahmedabad, opinion is evenly divided, while there are four capitals where her supporters outnumber her detractors by over 50 per cent; two of these, Calcutta and Madras, are opposition-ruled, (the other two being Congress(I)-ruled Delhi and Bhopal).

STATE OF THE NATION

While Mrs Gandhi's backers clearly outnumber those who are unhappy with her performance, around two-thirds of the electorate still feels that things are going badly.

According to the MARG-INDIA TODAY poll, in Bombay, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Jammu and Trivandrum, the percentage of the electorate stating that things are going badly is at least 45 per cent higher than the percentage stating that things are going well.

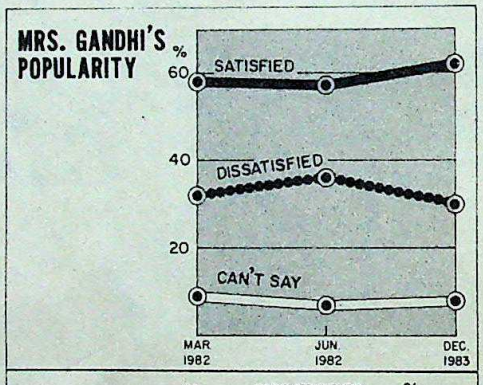
LAW AND ORDER

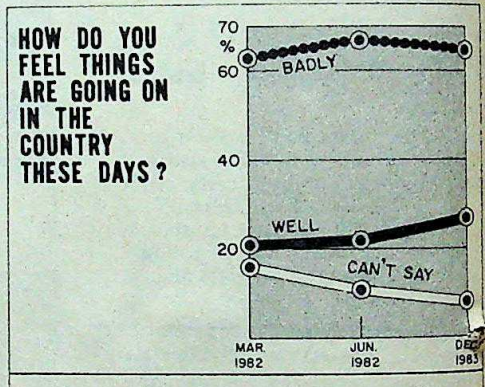
Those who feel that the law and order situation has deteriorated over the last one year are at least twice as numerous as those who feel that the situation has improved. This result is similar to the June 1982 result (when the question related to the preceding three months) except that the proportion who said 'the same' has declined in December 1983. Compared with June 1982, the balance of opinion is less favourable in December 1983.

There is not one single state capital covered in the poll where the balance of opinion is favourable. In Jaipur and Jammu, the response is overwhelmingly negative. Other cities where the balance of opinion is significantly unfavourable are Bombay, Delhi and Ahmedabad.

ELECTORAL POPULARITY

The MARG-INDIA TODAY poll findings show that as the Government of India begins its fifth year in office, it leads at the polls in 10 out of the 14 state capitals. An examination of the performance of the two opposition alliances suggests that Janata is clearly the vote-winning party in the United Front (UF). As far as the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is concerned, it is the BJP that is the driving force in the large cities.





JUN '82 / DEC '83	% SATISFIED	% DISSATISFIED	% UNDECIDED
Bombay	44 / 53	48 / 35	9 / 12
Ahmedabad	39 / 48	60 / 47	1 / 5
Bhopal	62 / 75	34 / 23	4 / 2
Calcutta	62 / 75	25 / 17	13 / 9
Patna	58 / 59	41 / 38	1 / 3
Bhubaneswar	41 / 61	58 / 25	1 / 14
Delhi	67 / 75	26 / 22	7 / 3
Lucknow	73 / 64	24 / 33	2 / 3
Jammu	88 / 51	10 / 44	3 / 5
Jaipur	73 / 35	24 / 62	3 / 3
Madras	73 / 72	21 / 20	6 / 9
Hyderabad	59 / 50	40 / 35	1 / 15
Trivandrum	54 / 65	44 / 28	2 / 7
Bangalore	34 / 58	59 / 36	7 / 6

JUN '82 / DEC '83	% WELL	% BADLY	% UNDECIDED
Bombay	11 / 16	80 / 71	9 / 13
Ahmedabad	12 / 24	77 / 69	11 / 7
Bhopal	25 / 38	63 / 60	12 / 2
Calcutta	28 / 28	61 / 67	12 / 5
Patna	37 / 36	51 / 63	12 / 1
Bhubaneswar	20 / 33	73 / 57	6 / 10
Delhi	32 / 26	58 / 69	10 / 5
Lucknow	30 / 35	60 / 61	11 / 4
Jammu	43 / 14	43 / 83	14 / 3
Jaipur	31 / 22	61 / 71	8 / 7
Madras	16 / 34	76 / 54	8 / 11
Hyderabad	20 / 39	56 / 42	23 / 19
Trivandrum	42 / 25	42 / 70	16 / 5
Bangalore	9 / 37	85 / 60	7 / 3

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In her traditional strongholds of the north, Mrs Gandhi's party has slipped in Jaipur into second position (31 per cent) behind the Janata Party (41 per cent). In the other three northern capitals, the Congress(I) is supported by 50 per cent to 62 per cent of the electorate. In Delhi and Lucknow, the main opposition is provided by the NDA (primarily the BJP), while in Jammu, the BJP and the National Conference are running neck and neck behind the Congress(I).

The Congress(I) also leads in two of the three western capitals. In Ahmedabad, the leader is the Janata-led UF. In Bombay, the Congress(I) leads, while the UF is second; in Bhopal, the BJP stronghold, the second slot is clearly held by the NDA.

The Congress(I) also dominates the political scene in the three eastern cities. The CPI(M) is second in Calcutta, while the NDA is second in Patna. In Bhubaneswar, both fronts have an almost equal level of support.

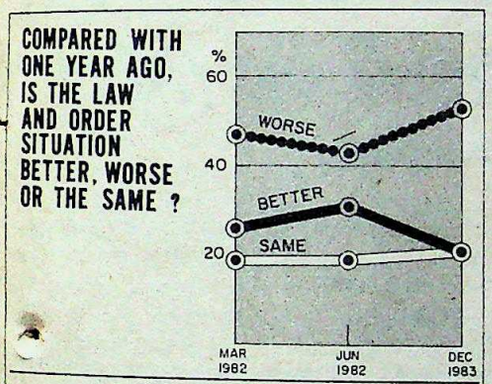
In the south, the Congress(I) is supported by 27 per cent to 37 per cent of the electorate in the four state capitals. It is the strongest party in Trivandrum and Hyderabad. In Trivandrum, the CPI(M) and the BJP vie for second position. In Hyderabad, NTR's charisma seems to be wearing thin, with the Telugu Desam and the BJP commanding almost equal support. In Madras, the AIADMK is the leader, though only marginally, with the Congress(I) second and the DMK a close third. In Bangalore, neither Moily's tapes nor C.M. Stephen's outbursts appeared to have significantly improved the image of the Congress(I); Janata is the clear leader, with the Congress(I) second.

THE PUNJAB IMBROGLIO

The findings of the MARG-INDIA TODAY poll show that, as in the case of Assam, those opposing the Government's handling of the Punjab problem (42 per cent) outnumber those who support the Government's policy (32 per cent); the remaining 26 per cent of the electorate was undecided.

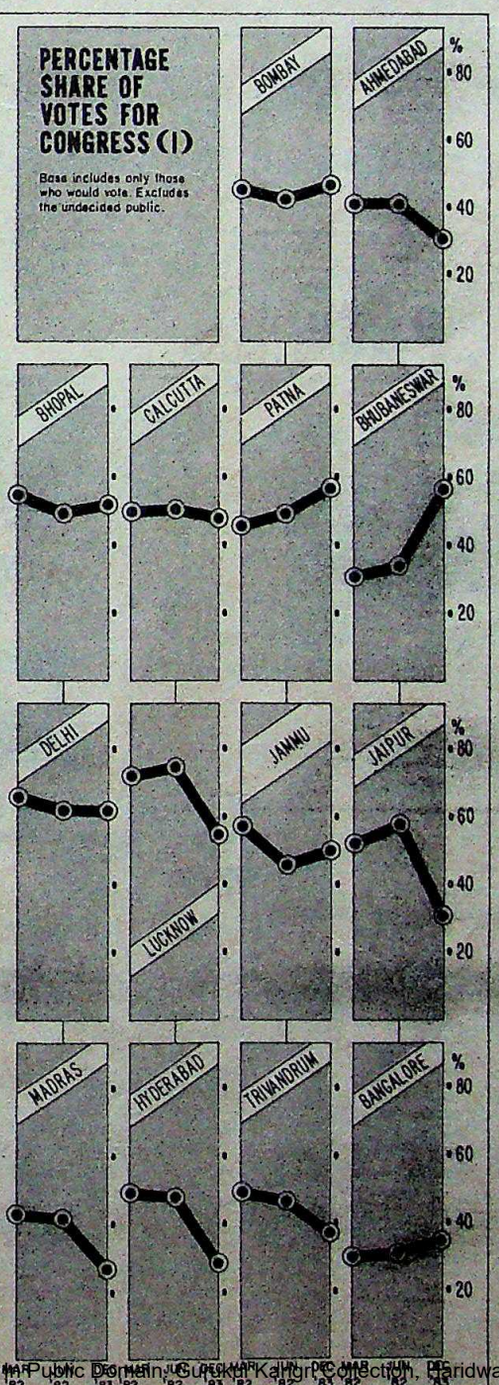
Electors in Bombay, Jaipur, Jammu, Delhi, Bhubaneswar and Bangalore are the most critical of the Government's actions. Backing for the Government's comes more from Bhopal and Patna than elsewhere.

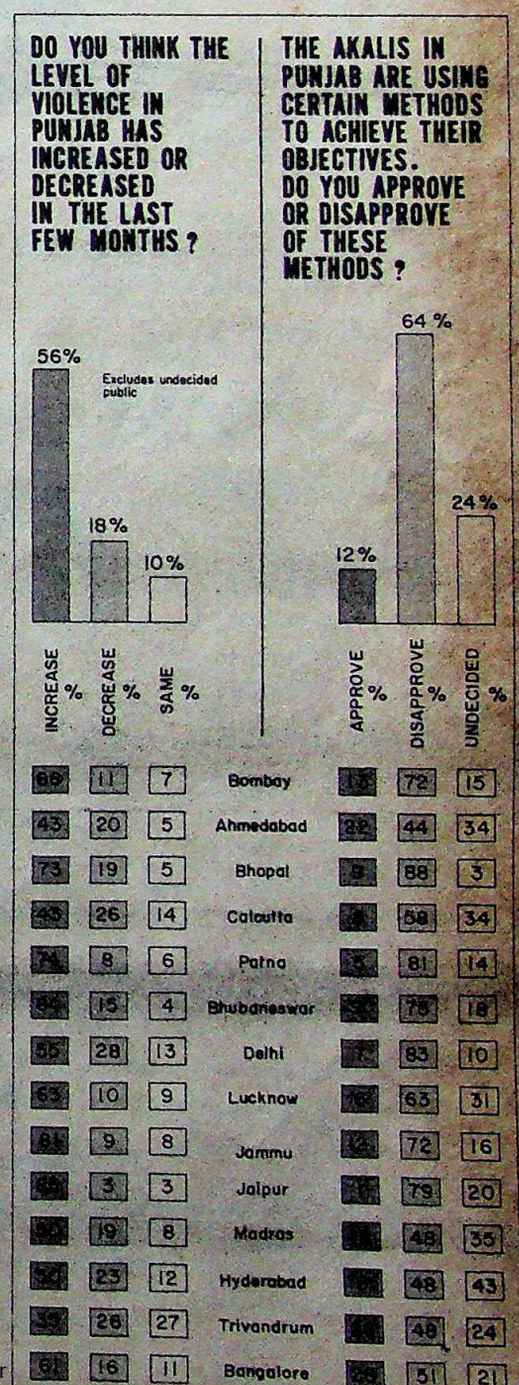
The poll shows that there is a clear feeling among the electorate that the level of



	JUN '82 / DEC '83 % BETTER	% WORSE	% SAME
Bombay	6 / 15	58 / 55	28 / 23
Ahmedabad	7 / 17	50 / 63	41 / 13
Bhopal	18 / 29	47 / 58	32 / 12
Calcutta	24 / 21	28 / 49	38 / 28
Patna	30 / 20	38 / 59	27 / 20
Bhubaneswar	17 / 30	35 / 42	44 / 22
Delhi	25 / 18	36 / 59	32 / 22
Lucknow	28 / 27	41 / 61	24 / 9
Jammu	47 / 7	23 / 82	20 / 9
Jaipur	18 / 3	48 / 86	28 / 8
Madras	15 / 33	60 / 43	21 / 19
Hyderabad	26 / 22	32 / 33	36 / 35
Trivandrum	38 / 38	26 / 52	30 / 8
Bangalore	7 / 32	56 / 47	32 / 19

Excludes undecided public





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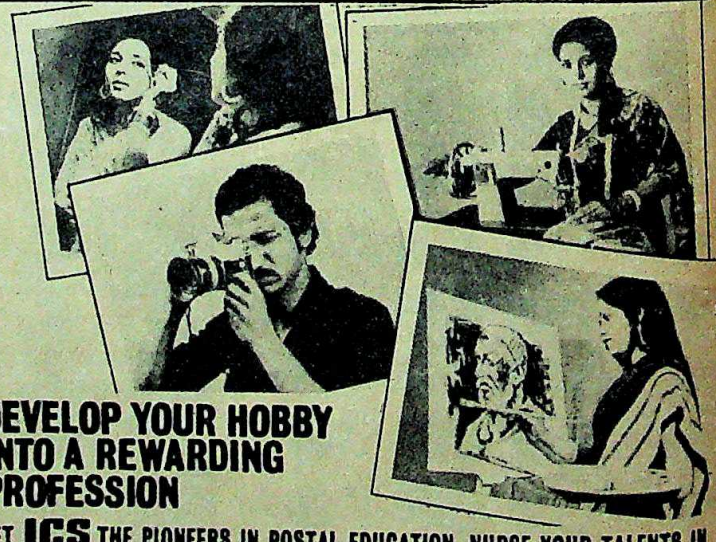
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AS YOU MAY BE AWARE, SOME OPPOSITION PARTIES HAVE COME TOGETHER TO FIGHT ELECTIONS. DO YOU APPROVE OR DISAPPROVE OF THESE MOVES TOWARDS UNITY?

YES	43 %
NO	41 %
UNDECIDED	16 %

IF OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE ELECTED TO POWER, DO YOU THINK THAT THESE PARTIES WILL STAY UNITED OR BREAK UP?

STAY UNITED	14 %
BREAK UP	59 %
UNDECIDED	27 %

IS YOUR OWN ECONOMIC POSITION TODAY BETTER, WORSE OR THE SAME AS COMPARED A YEAR AGO?

BETTER	22 %
WORSE	42 %
SAME	35 %

violence has increased in the last few months (after the imposition of President's rule).

In every single city, the balance of opinion suggests that the level of violence in Punjab has increased. In six cities (Bombay, Bhopal, Patna, Jammu, Lucknow and Jaipur), the percentage of the electorate stating that violence has increased is at least 50 per cent higher than the proportion indicating that violence has decreased.

That the vast majority of the electorate disapproves of the methods adopted by the Akalis to secure their ends is hardly likely to come as a surprise to the Akali supremos in Amritsar.

Disapproval of the Akalis' methods extends to every single city, with the balance of opinion (those approving minus those disapproving) more than 70 per cent against the Akalis in Bhopal, Patna, Delhi and Jaipur.

While 30 per cent blame the Akalis for the failure to solve the Punjab problem, 20 per cent blame the Government. The remaining half of the electorate either blames both parties (29 per cent) or is undecided (21 per cent). The Akalis fare the worst in Patna and Bhopal (with the balance of opinion being 40 per cent or more against them). In only two cities (Ahmedabad and Trivandrum) does the balance tilt slightly (10 per cent) in favour of the Akalis.

OPPOSITION ALLIANCES

The opinion of the electorate covered in the MARG-INDIA TODAY poll is fairly evenly divided on the moves of some opposition parties who have come together to fight elections. But, having seen the prima donnas in action during the Janata years, the electorate over-whelmingly believes that, if elected to power, these parties would not stay united.

The 'unity' moves to fight elections find greatest support in Bombay, Ahmedabad, Patna, Hyderabad and Bangalore. Opposition to those moves is the highest in Jaipur, followed by Delhi, Trivandrum and Lucknow.

In every single city, electors believe that if the 'alliance' come to power, the 'partners' would not stay together for long. This view is held most strongly in Jaipur, Jammu, Bhopal, Delhi, Patna and Madras.

THE ASSAM PROBLEM

While 40 per cent of the electorate in the 13 cities disapproves of the manner in which the Government has handled the Assam problem, 34 per cent back the Government's actions and 26 per cent are undecided.

DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE WAY THE GOVERNMENT IS HANDLING THE ASSAM PROBLEM?

AGREE	34 %
DISAGREE	40 %
UNDECIDED	26 %

The Government's policy is most strongly disapproved in Jaipur, Bombay, Bhubaneswar and Bangalore, while it is in Calcutta that the Government has the greatest backing.

STATE OF THE ECONOMY

Despite Pranab Mukherjee's soothing pronouncements concerning the economy, there is a strong feeling that the economy is doing worse than a year ago. No less than 50 per cent of the electorate feels the national economy is doing worse than a year ago, while 22 per cent felt it is now doing better, another 23 per cent thought it was the same and 5 per cent was undecided.

The balance of opinion is the most unfavourable in Calcutta and Jaipur. Delhi is the only city where views on the Indian economy are almost evenly divided.

ECONOMIC STATUS

The electors were asked if their economic position (as compared with a year ago) was better, worse or the same.

While a third of the respondents of the MARG-INDIA TODAY poll reported no change, the balance of opinion among the remainder suggested a deterioration of the economic condition.

The tales of woe were the greatest in jaipur, Patna, Calcutta and Trivandrum. In a few cities—Bhopal, Hyderabad and Madras—the balance of opinion was only marginally negative. It was only in the seat of the Government, Delhi, which has enjoyed the fruits of the Asiad, NAM and CHOGM during the last 12 months or so, that the 'better offs' outnumbered the 'worse offs' by a slender one per cent.

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1984

The Future is Now



THE WORLD has finally stepped onto the forbidden shores of 1984, George Orwell's apocalyptic year. There has been a lot of '1984' in the western countries, and some in India in the last two decades. Having arrived at 1984, it is compelling to ask how much and which of the nightmarish visions of Orwell apply to the Indian condition? A television documentary shown in the US recently claimed that more than 80 per cent of Orwell's predictions about a frightening, centralised all-seeing bureaucracy has already come to exist in America. The Indian bureaucracy is indeed a leviathan. But in character and attire, in outlook and behaviour, it is more Kafkaesque than Orwellian. However, many Indians feel that there is a Big Brother watching them all the time, looking down on them as they go about their daily chores.

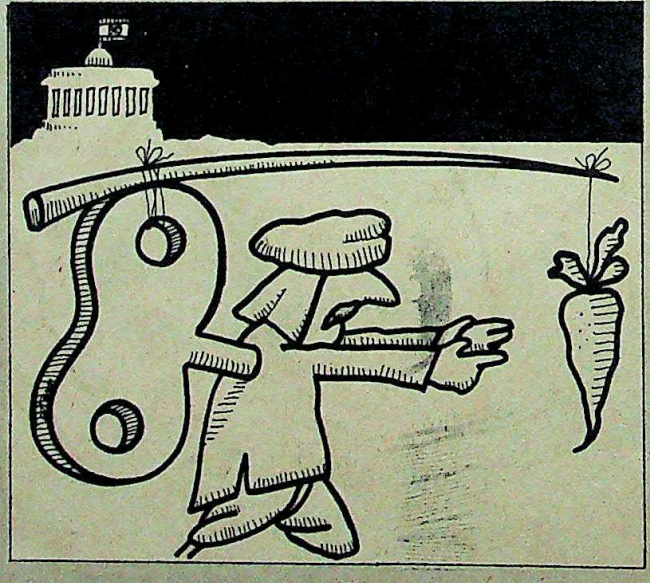
There is in India, as in all other countries, a Ministry of Truth doling out huge helpings daily of the truth as seen by the establishment, authorised, sanitised versions of events and non-events. People with a sense of humour, a somewhat scarce commodity in a nation of 700 million, call it the Ministry of Ifs and Buts (I&B). Ifs and Buts are also built into the style of Indian thinking.

Indians generally do not think in terms of apocalypse—now or in the future. We are used to human suffering and deprivation. We are not easily shocked. Few Indians have nightmares thinking about the present or the future of India or the world. *Ninteteen Eighty-Four* therefore has not penetrated the Indian sensitivities. Hardly any Indian has tried to relate the situation in India to Orwell's world of 1984. In P.N. Haksar's *Premonitions*, there is no trace of an Orwellian vision of India. Nirad Chaudhuri has seen a lot of Kafka in contemporary India, as have others. But little of Orwell. However, a fictional account of the next war between India and Pakistan, published recently, for some unexplained reason puts that war in 1984! But Ravi Rikhey, author of the "novel", does not suffer from Orwellian nightmares.

Double Values: If "1984" has happened in India, it has happened in the two major realms of language and values. In Orwell's novel, the world is dominated by three superlarge states who are constantly at war with one another for no particular reason. The hero, Winston Smith, lives in Oceania, one of the three superstates, the capital of which is London, and which is ruled by English socialism, an Orwellian substitute for Stalinist communism. The language of Oceania is Newspeak. It has been devised to meet the requirements of "Engsoc" or "English Socialism". Newspeak consists either of newly coined words or words stripped of their old meaning. It is also purged of undesirable words. For example, Newspeak uses the word "free" only to say that "the dog is free from lice", or "this field is free from weeds". It cannot be used to mean "men are born free" or "I must be intellectually free".

Newspeak generates and thrives on thought-cum-language mechanisms called Doublethink and Doublespeak. Doublethink means thinking simultaneously on contradictory tracks. Doublespeak allows you to make your words mean what you want them to mean and not what they actually mean. Doublethink is used by the regime in Eurasia for manipulating and controlling the thinking of its citizens. Doublespeak is the language of the Ministry of Truth. Samples of the truth in Doublespeak: "War is Peace"; "Freedom is Slavery"; "Ignorance is Strength".

Doublethink has become the mental track of modern industrial and post-industrial civilisation. But it prevails in a developing and industrialising country like India also on a grand scale. When our planners think of self-sufficiency, they are actually planning to prolong, if not perpetuate, India's dependencies. Most official pronouncements bear testimony to Doubtlethink. "No meaningful discussions can be held between India and Pakistan on the proposals for a friendship treaty or a no-war pact unless there is improvement in the vitiated atmosphere between the two countries." Doublethink, because the "vitiated atmosphere" can be improved only by talking about no-war and/or friendship. "Prices cannot be brought down under any system of economy, but our success in the administration of economy lies in the fact that we have controlled the rate of growth." Doublethink because prices can be and are in fact brought down under both socialistic and capitalist economic systems, and Indian economic administration has not succeeded in controlling price rises.



There is in India, as in all other countries, a Ministry of Truth doling out huge helpings daily of the truth as seen by the establishment, authorised, sanitised versions of events and non-events. People endowed with a sense of humour, a somewhat scarce commodity in a nation of 700 million, call it the Ministry of Ifs and Buts (I&B). Ifs and Buts are also built into the style of Indian thinking.

Euphemisms: If Doublethink has invaded the Indian mind in a big way, Doublespeak has become part of the vocabulary of Indian politics. Every Indian politician today is a master of Doublespeak. The language of politics is peopled with euphemisms, plastic coats of meaning that hide the real meanings of actions or events. Words do not reflect facts. Words recreate realities to suit regime requirements. A Bombay weekly publishes on December 24 an interview with Mrs Gandhi in which she says, "I think we are going ahead with our talks" with Pakistan on normalisation of relations. The same day Foreign Secretary M.K. Rasgotra tells the Pakistani ambassador that normalisation talks cannot be resumed until the "vitiated" atmosphere improves.

Doublespeak and Doublethink create a double standard moral code to govern social and political behaviour. "Encounters" pass as legitimate murder by policemen of men they are not particularly fond of. Mafia elec-

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ments are admitted to political parlours and made men and women of power, position and prestige. Political morality becomes as elastic as the conscience of Bhajan Lal, near-perpetual chief minister of Haryana. Remember his affidavit before Justice Jaganmohan Reddy in the Manohar Lal-Bansi Lal case, in which Bhajan Lal recalled that he was a Haryana minister from June 1970 to July 1975, but resigned within a week of the declaration of Emergency. Why did he resign? "Because I did not think it right to continue. My conscience did not permit me to continue as minister when lakhs of people were being harassed and arrested in the country...". A perfect mingle of Doublespeak and Doublethink.

In ORWELL's Oceania, the assigned task of the Records Department, in which Winston Smith works, is to rewrite history either by changing texts and statistics that do not fit in with the facts and realities or by simply destroying documents which go against the regime's authorised truths. The process is not entirely absent in contemporary India. Addressing a conference of lawyers in New Delhi some time ago, Mrs Gandhi blamed the opposition parties for "resorting to agitational tactics" indiscriminately, and for adopting a "confrontationist" attitude even at a time of "grave economic peril". Then she proceeded to recompose recent history: "In recent times the Opposition in India functioned with responsibility and dignity only when we in Congress constituted the Opposition...We launched no extra-parliamentary agitations." .That authoritative sentence banished from the pages of current Indian political history several headline-making political actions of the Congress in the 18 months of Janata rule.

Oriental despotism, remnants of which still prevail in India, was Orwellian in its totalitarian character. The Indian bureaucracy is not half as efficient as the bureaucracies in the advanced industrialised countries. But its domineering attitude towards the ordinary Indian, its olympian indifference to the human dignity of the common man lends it an Orwellian quality. As a man, an Indian is dwarfed by all the Big Machines that have been erected as towers of the political system —the corporations, the authorities, the big business houses, the police, in fact all paraphernalia of power and wealth.

Orwell, of course, did not have India or other developing countries in mind when he wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Published in 1949, it changed Orwell's fortunes, making him rich and famous in no time. As a novel, it is not particularly well-written, nor is it the best of Orwell's prose. It was deeply influenced by Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia and was offered to a world locked in the cold war as a political testament denouncing totalitarianism. In subsequent years *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm* were two of the most effectively used books in the non-communist world to combat the influence of communism. *Animal Farm* became compulsory reading in all missionary schools in the non-communist world; it is still so in most missionary schools in India.

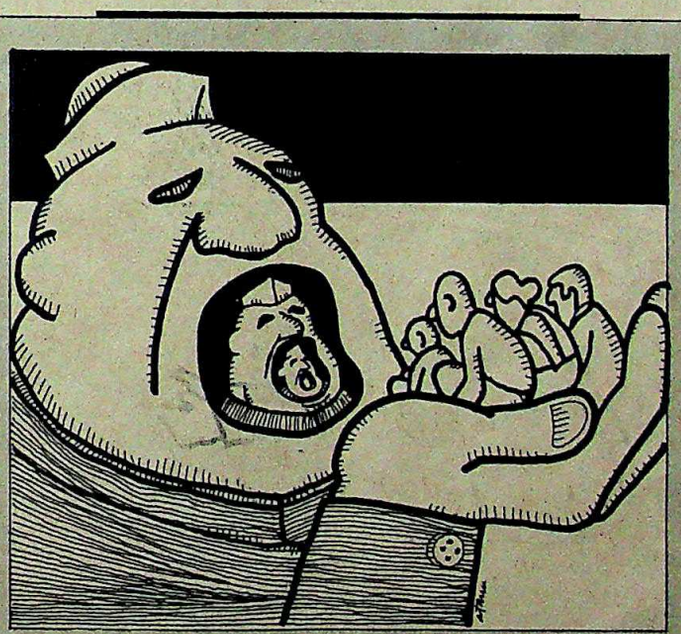
The Basis: Orwell lived at the very last moment of a period of world history which had lasted 300 to 400 years. It was a period in which political units in the main grew larger with the sole exception of the Turkish empire. He did not visualise the transformation of the European empires into a host of sovereign nation states in Asia and Africa. The author of *Burmese Days* was not free from colonial warts. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* a war is raging on the "Malabar front" in "South India", but India does not figure at all.

Orwell is no intellectual priest of the Third World. Yet he has proved to be a prophet. His vision of a world perpetually at war with itself without clear objectives or purposes has been confirmed by history. He saw with clear eyes the emerging domination of man by Big Machines and by Organisation. He saw a wholesale dwarfing of the individual, a gigantic expansion of the powers of the state over people, the coming of a historical period when men and women all over the world would tend to lose rather than enlarge their personal freedoms and privacies. He also saw the devastations to language by the emergence of the all-powerful machines. Doublespeak has become the language of the modern state—of the United States and India and the Soviet Union and Peru. Human thinking has been overrun by all-powerful, all-pervading think machines—Maothink, Reaganthink, Fidelthink and Indirathink.

George Orwell was not, and will not be, the only man of talent and vision to portray a dark picture of the future of mankind. Well over a decade before *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Aldous Huxley had written *Brave New World* predicting test-tube babies. Huxley's was a far-off world re-created by science and technology, by men in power, who set out to manufacture human beings to predetermined formulas of physical strength and mental imbecility. It was a satire on the idea of Progress Unlimited, whose relevance to the modern world became startlingly clear in the last decade or two. With genetic engineering breathing down the spine of modern societies, Huxley's relevance to the future decades may prove to be greater than Orwell's.

Orwell lacked Huxley's wit and raillery. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is no satire on the Big Brother that is the modern state everywhere. It was meant to be a grim warning against the System dwarfing man. From that point of view Orwell has been found a proven prophet. "1984" is with us whether we live in New York or Moscow or Beijing or Bombay. The System is all powerful. The Big Brother watches you wherever you are. The Machine has reduced man both in size and spirit. But there Orwell rests. The world has moved to a post-Orwellian period. After 1984, there can be no more '1984ing'.

—BHABANI SEN GUPTA



If Doublethink has invaded the Indian mind in a big way, Doublespeak has become part of the vocabulary of Indian politics. Every Indian politician today is a master of Doublespeak. The language of politics is peopled with euphemisms, plastic coats of meanings that hide the real meanings of actions or events. Words do not reflect facts. Words recreate realities to suit regime requirements.

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BY-ELECTIONS

Qualified Success

IT HAS not been a cheerless Christmas for the Congress(I). The party came through the trial run in north India and West Bengal well ahead of the Opposition, winning eight out of 11 assembly seats and one out of three parliamentary seats. But while the figures may have looked impressive at first glance, there was a darker side to the picture—no amount of jugglery could conceal the fact that the party's winning margins had been sliced thin and if the opposition votes had not been split the story might have been very different indeed.

In fact, with the exception of Bihar Chief Minister Chandra Shekhar Singh, who won handsomely, nearly all the Congress(I) candidates saw their margins drop dramatically. As a result the victory celebrations were kept at a very low key. Congress(I) leaders could hardly ignore losses like Bettiah, where their candidate Manoj Pandey lost by over 11,000 votes; in 1980, the late Kedar Pandey, his father, had held the seat by an enormous 1.10 lakh votes. Similarly in the Tindwari assembly constituency in Uttar Pradesh where former chief minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh won in 1980 by 60,000 votes, the margin was down to 18,000.

Rude Shock: The biggest jolt for the Congress(I) came from Uttar Pradesh. The party polled a bare 32 per cent of the total votes in the five assembly by-elections against the combined opposition's total of 51 per cent. In the 1980 elections, the party's tally was, on an average, above 50 per cent. Said party General Secretary Rajiv Gandhi: "On the whole, we have done quite well in these by-elections but the performance in Uttar Pradesh was not as it should have been." The Congress(I) suffered some particularly humiliating defeats, such as Fazilnagar, which it lost to the Lok Dal by 11,000 votes and Pilibhit where it was defeated by Mrs Gandhi's bugbear, the Rashtriya Sanjay Manch (RSM). Riaz Ahmed of the RSM upset all predictions by beating the Congress(I)'s Gur Sewak Singh by 6,000 votes to become the party's first elected man in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly. Party President Maneka Gandhi was understandably ecstatic about the result and triumphantly declared: "I am pleased. After all the voters of Uttar Pradesh have proved that the RSM is the force to reckon with in the state."

The Congress(I) also had to take some other particularly hard blows in the state. It lost the Bulandshahr parliamentary seat even though it had confidently expected to cash in on the divisions in the opposition ranks. Since the Lok Dal which had won the seat in 1980, fielded a Muslim candidate, the Congress(I) did likewise. In the event Janata Party candidate Banarsi Das managed to rally all the Hindus. Significantly, Bulandshahr was the only constituency where the Opposition managed to exploit the beef tallow issue to the hilt. The irrepressible Raj Narain went personally from house to house requesting people to punish the Congress(I) for permitting the adulteration of vanaspati with beef tallow. Banarsi Das squeaked past with a thin majority of 14,000, but there was the additional sobering thought for everyone that if the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) had put its weight behind him, he would have won by over 1 lakh votes.

Personal Defeat: The Uttar Pradesh results were undoubtedly something of a personal defeat for state Chief Minister Sripat Misra. Only a few months ago he had been pointing to the party's thumping win in the gram panchayat elections to prove his claim that the party's base had expanded enormously in the rural belt. The December elections revealed quite otherwise. Before Misra took over as chief minister, the Congress(I) won all except one Lok Sabha by-election, and 10 of the 12 assembly by-elections. The Congress(I) set-backs are attributed mainly to the poor administration of the state. Says a UPCC(I) office-bearer: "The mandate is basically against the state Government and not against the Central leadership. If the state

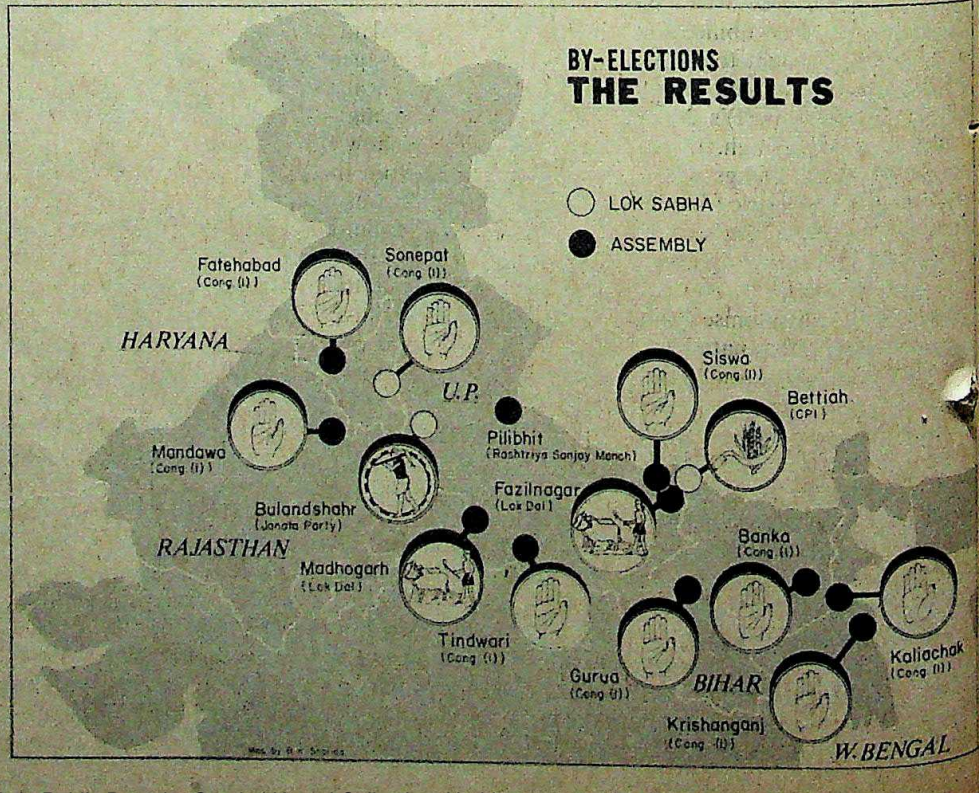


PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Chandra Shekhar Singh: a mandate to rule

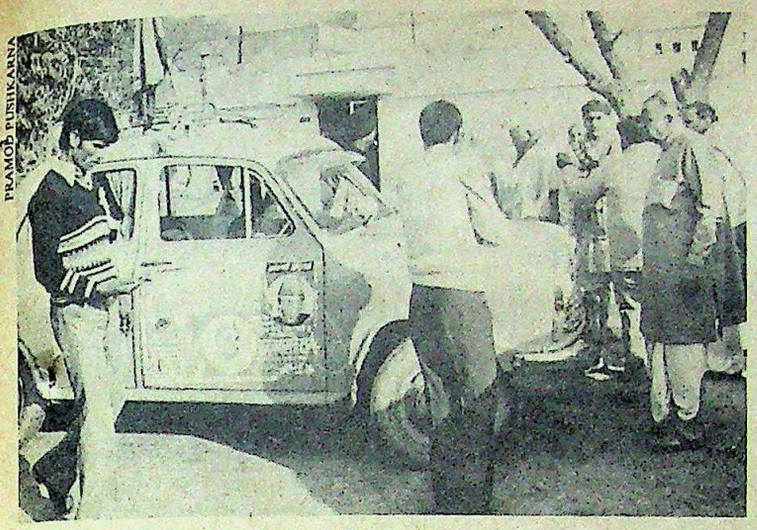
Government was a little more concerned with development activities than sending ministers to New Delhi, the results would have been different."

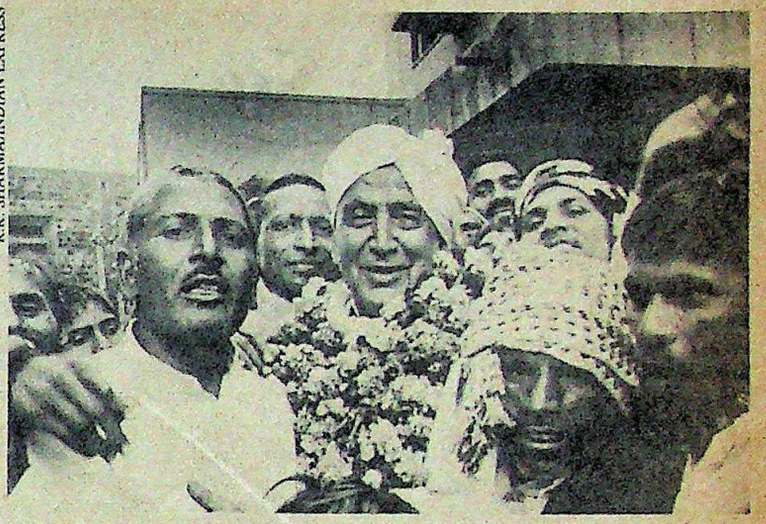
In neighbouring Bihar which sends 54 members to Parliament also the voters were letting it be known that they could not be taken for granted. The Congress(I) lost the prestigious Bettiah Lok Sabha seat most surprisingly to the CPI candidate Pitamber Singh. When the campaign began it was widely predicted that the CPI candidate would lose his deposit. The fight was thought to be mainly between the Lok Dal and the Congress(I). In the event the Lok Dal was pushed to third place and the Janata Party candidate forfeited his deposit. Congress(I) leaders believe that caste considerations worked in



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PRAMOD PUSHKARNA


R.K. SHARMA/INDIAN EXPRESS

Victorious: Banarsi Das on the campaign trail in Bulandshahr and (right) Rizk Ram after his election from Sonepat

favour of the CPI which fielded a Thakur in a predominantly Thakur constituency.

AGAIN, however, the Congress(I) has to face the unpleasant reality that another factor largely responsible for the defeat was the indifferent attitude of former chief minister Jagannath Mishra's supporters. Mishra was belatedly called on to campaign but declined when he found that he was only being asked to speak in two public meetings. Later five pro-Mishra district Congress(I) committee office-bearers were suspended for anti-party activities. Despite factionalism, however, the chief minister managed to finish 43,000 votes ahead of his BJP rival Babu Lal Mandal.

In the Gurua assembly seat also the Congress(I) candidate won by 14,000 votes. But here again the combined opposition had the consoling thought to fall back on, that together they had polled over 31,000 votes against the Congress(I)'s 24,000. Said Satyendra Narayan Singh, the Bihar Janata Party president: "Things would have been better for the Opposition if some of us had not stood on false prestige. There are enough lessons for the entire opposition to learn from the by-election results." Satyendra Narayan Singh must himself be aware of one of these lessons: the Janata Party's defeat in Bihar—despite its formidable caste alignments—is in no small measure due to growing indiscipline in the party. Just two weeks before the elections, three Janata MLA's and an MP Hukum Narain Dev Yadav, quit the Janata for the Lok Dal.

Ironically, only in West Bengal, the long-time bastion of the CPI(M) did the Congress(I) notch up significant gains, wresting two assembly seats, Kaliachak in the northern district of Malda and Krishanganj in Nadia, from the Marxists. In Kaliachak, Shamsuddin Ahmed, the Congress(I) candidate, converted his earlier 9,232 defeat into victory by a margin of 4,916 votes. In Krishanganj, Ananda Mohan Biswas, a former minister of state in the Congress ministry of 1972-77, avenged his successive defeats in 1977 and 1982 when he squeaked past the CPI(M) candidate by a bare 598 votes.

Pointers: Both seats are special in their own way. Kaliachak is a predominantly Muslim constituency and Krishanganj is reserved for the Scheduled Castes. The outcome of the two by-elections is a pointer to the fading appeal of the Marxists among the minorities and the Scheduled Castes. Since the two constituencies are predominantly rural it also showed that for the first time, after six years in power the Marxists may be losing touch with their grassroots support in the villages.

Quite understandably the Congress(I) was jubilant about its victory. Motahar Hossain, general secretary of the West Bengal PCC(I), was quick to write off the Marxists, saying: "The election results in West Bengal show that the people want to be liberated from the misrule of the Left Front." Hossain was of course indulging in a bit of rhetoric, but the results did come as a rude shock for the Left Front leaders who had not really put their hearts into the campaign. Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, for instance, addressed only one election rally at Kaliachak before the poll. Admitted Saroj Mukherjee, chairman of the Left Front and secretary of the state unit of the CPI(M): "The results show that our government has not been able to work satisfactorily among the masses. There is urgent need to restore party discipline."

Still, the success in West Bengal was a flash in the pan for the Congress(I). And in the wake of the by-elections it was obvious that the writing on the wall was clear for everyone in the game. For the Congress(I) it appeared that its strength in the Hindi-speaking states is dependent on the chronic inability of the opposition parties to put up a combined fight. This lesson was also not lost on the Opposition. H.N. Bahuguna, president of the Democratic Socialist Party, whose lone candidate lost the Fazilnagar constituency in Uttar Pradesh, commented after the elections with a touch of wry humour that "Mrs Gandhi's victory is always the result of a triangular plot. She wins because we are divided." Atal Behari Vajpayee the BJP president adds: "It is still not too late for all of us to see that the votes are not split and reach some sort of understanding."

Bitter Lessons: Vajpayee may suddenly find that many opposition leaders agree with him. They have all learnt some bitter lessons after these elections. The Janata Party has possibly suffered the most. Though it won Bulandshahr, it finished a poor fourth in Bettiah and its candidates forfeited their deposits in the majority of the assembly by-elections. Two of its defeats came in Bihar which is reputed to be its stronghold. The Lok Dal and the BJP which are fighting together as the NDA also had their share of reverses. The Lok Dal lost two Parliament seats—Sonepat, where the Congress(I)'s Rizk Ram won, and Bulandshahr to the Janata Party and though it won two of the five assembly seats it contested it was clearly a disappointing performance. Its ally the BJP lost all the four seats it contested in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal.

The Congress(I)'s narrow margins everywhere spell out a very clear message. But the big question that remains is whether the opposition leaders will go out of their way to do anything about it. And if they are reluctant to make further moves towards unity that will spell a clear advantage for Mrs Gandhi if she calls for a snap poll any time between March and May. But if the opposition parties succeed in uniting, Mrs Gandhi is not going to find the going easy.

—PRABHU CHAWLA with bureau reports

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ASSAM

Changing Strategy

BLUE blazers were out on the Gauhati University campus again last fortnight. Almost a year after the 23rd round of talks with the Central Government ended on a disastrous note in Delhi, leading to a forced election, the leaders of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) were back to a negotiating table of sorts. Dressed almost ceremoniously in the blue AASU colours, they received representatives of the national political parties in Gauhati for an All India Convention of National Political Parties to discuss the problems of Assam.

But apart from the blue that characterised the hosts, the convention turned out to be a rather colourless affair with the top leaders of all opposition parties opting to stay away and the left parties not participating. But the convention was important if only as an indication that it was time to change strategy. Its failure gave credence to the opinion that AASU should sponsor a new regional political power — an AASU euphemism for a new regional political party.

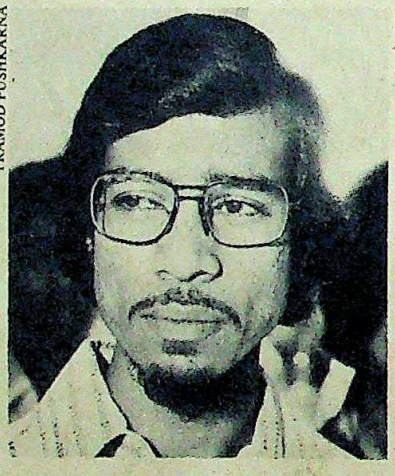
The AASU supporters and political observers are now eagerly awaiting the outcome of a "National Convention on Assam", which AASU is organising at Jorhat on January 10 and 11, ostensibly to seek a popular mandate for the political venture. People from all sections of society, including left intellectuals and members of the smaller regional parties, are being invited to the convention where the basic political thrust of the new party will be decided. In all likelihood, there will also be a demand for the two listed regional parties, the Assam Jatiyatabadi Dal and the Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad, both constituents of the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) to merge with the new unit.

But while the formation of a political party would be a watershed in the five-year-old agitation, it will be a tricky proposition for AASU, for under its constitution, AASU office-bearers cannot take part in politics. Therefore, leadership for the new party will have to be culled from outside unless some of the older AASU leaders decide to grow out of student politics. Explains General Secretary Bhrigu Phukan: "AASU cannot at the moment participate in politics. But since people want a strong regional force, something will have to be done."

The development is significant in the sense that it will decide the shape of the next phase of agitation that the AASU leaders plan to launch around the third week of January, beginning perhaps on Republic Day. Said AASU President Prafulla Mahanta: "We are yet to decide the approach of the agitation, though it will certainly be non-violent." But with the almost inevitable politicisation the removal of the Congress(I) Government may now become the focus.

Uncertain Popularity: The new thinking has brought mixed reactions. While critics take digs at AASU for having "accepted the reality after five years", the pro-movement population, which is still in a large

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA





SHEKHAR GUPTA



(Clockwise from top left) Prafulla Mahanta and Bhrigu Phukan, and agitation leaders with Unnikrishnan, Ravindra Varma and Jaswant Singh during the convention of national political parties: disappointing attendance

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majority, is in a new mood of anticipation. Said an Assamese lawyer: "People were fed up with pointless bandhs and road blockades. The businessmen had even told AASU that it was impossible for them to go on suffering loss like this."

It was this political realisation that led to AASU's decision to hold the convention of national opposition parties—even if it came a cropper in terms of publicity value. It was obvious that the convention, against which there was much opposition in AASU circles, was part of an effort by the agitators to keep the pot boiling and to provide a sort of populist pace-setter to the new phase of agitations. And if it fell short of its objective, the blame—from the agitators' point of view—lay with the opposition leaders.

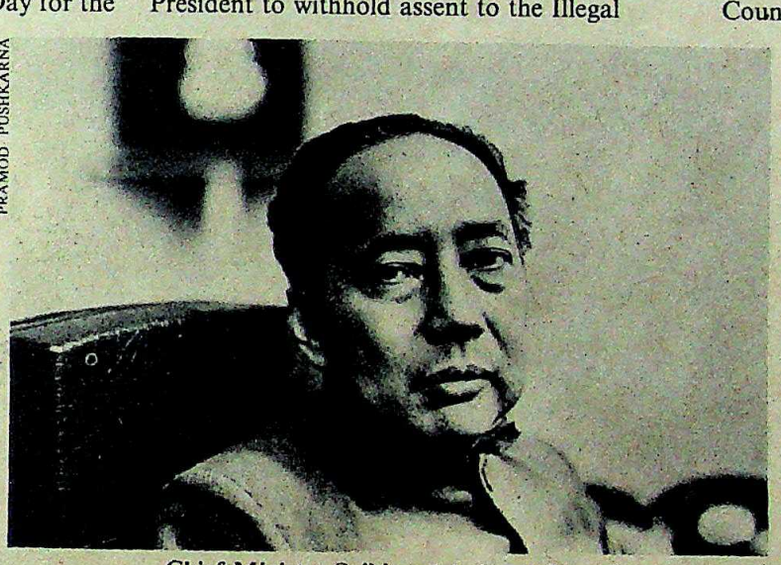
Chandra Shekhar, at whose instance the agitators had chosen Christmas Day for the convention, failed to turn up owing to commitments "made earlier". Vajpayee used the same excuse while Bahuguna's illness kept him away. The agitation leaders had high hopes of Farooq Abdullah but he declined to come, probably at the persuasion of Nurul Hussain, the estranged former vice-president of AASU, who made the rounds in Delhi with other Muslim representatives from Assam, asking opposition leaders to give the convention a miss.

Absentee Leaders: The hope that Charan Singh would attend also did not materialise and the Lok Dal did not even send a replacement—though Jaswant Singh, representing the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), was at pains to explain that the constituents of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) had no difference of opinion on Assam. The anxiously awaited participation of the left parties was also not to be. While the CPI(M) refused to attend, the CPI nominated its state General Secretary, Promode Gogoi, to represent it.

AASU leaders had more or less made it clear that they would have nothing to do with those Assamese leaders of opposition parties who had participated in the February 1983 election. Gogoi was not even invited to the meetings. Prafulla Mahanta said there was no need for an invitation, while CPI General Secretary, C. Rajeswar Rao, issued a statement explaining that his party had gone unrepresented because of lack of response from AASU.

Admitted an AASU supporter: "Whichever way it happened, with Jaswant Singh, Ravindra Varma and K.P. Unnikrishnan representing the BJP, Janata and Congress(S) respectively, the convention was reduced to a mere reunion of an old boys' club of some kind." All the three MP's have participated in the tripartite talks earlier and are known for views obviously sympathetic to the Assam agitators. In fact the AASU leaders went out of their way not to embarrass Unnikrishnan, whose Congress(S) had participated—with disastrous results—in the election.

WITH such a familiar array of participants, the outcome of the convention was only predictable. A 'joint communique' issued after night-long deliberations turned out to be no more than four pages of rhetoric. The convention demanded dissolution of the Assam Assembly, solution to the foreign nationals problem through negotiations and appealed to the President to withhold assent to the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Bill, 1983.



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Chief Minister Saikia: claiming "victory"

In fact, much of the fire was directed against the bill, which the opposition leaders promised to challenge in the Supreme Court. Said Unnikrishnan: "The bill is not only unconstitutional but also contradictory of most citizenship laws." Jaswant Singh was more specific: "This convention hinges on the topicality of this bill which is creating legal myths like declaring all the pre-1971 infiltrators Indian citizens."

Significantly, the participants blamed the increasing incidence of violence on frustration caused by non-resumption of negotiations and the communique makes a clear request to the Government to resume negotiations so as to strengthen the moderates and prevent the situation from passing into extremist hands. Yet the opposition leaders were not sure how the ice could be broken. Said Ravindra Varma: "True to his style, the home minister keeps making contradictory statements. While announcing that the fate of the 1961-71 infiltrators is open to discussion, the Government is going on presenting the people with one *fait accompli* after another, like the Immigrants Bill."

Embarrassing Cancellation: Another damper to the agitators' plans, besides the absence of the leading lights of the Opposition, was the cancellation of their plan to hold a mass public rally in Gauhati. AASU and the opposition leaders said they had called off the meeting in protest against the administration's insistence on their using just one microphone and imposing other restrictions. Fumed Unnikrishnan: "I suppose Assam is as much a part of the country as any other. How could they impose such restrictions on a meeting to be addressed by people holding offices in the country's major political parties?"

Countered Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia: "I asked the deputy commissioner and he said he had only received an application from an AASU member for permission to hold the rally. This was granted by a junior magistrate with routine restrictions in view of the disturbed conditions. Even these would have been waived if the organisers had requested us to. The protest is just a ruse to cover the basic fact that with the important leaders failing to turn up, AASU had no hope of collecting a crowd." AASU supporters, however, say that if collecting a crowd was the only objective, their own leaders are the biggest crowd-pullers in the Brahmaputra Valley.

But while AASU supporters argued that the convention was meant to be more than a reiteration of an already known stance, Saikia claimed full victory over its "failure". Said he: "It is not the same AASU which till the other day claimed to have made the national political parties irrelevant. The same people who burnt effigies of Jyoti Basu, Dev Kant Barooah and Sarat Chandra Sinha are now falling all over to call them to their convention."

Saikia points out that till a year ago the same opposition leaders used to go around seeking appointments from the AASU leaders, but adds: "I welcome the change all the same. The AASU movement has been parochial, regional and communal and hopefully the national Opposition's association will broaden their approach into a more balanced one." What will happen when—and if—the movement does carry its fight into the political battlefield is, of course, an open question.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Gauhati

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CONGRESS(I)

The Threat Within

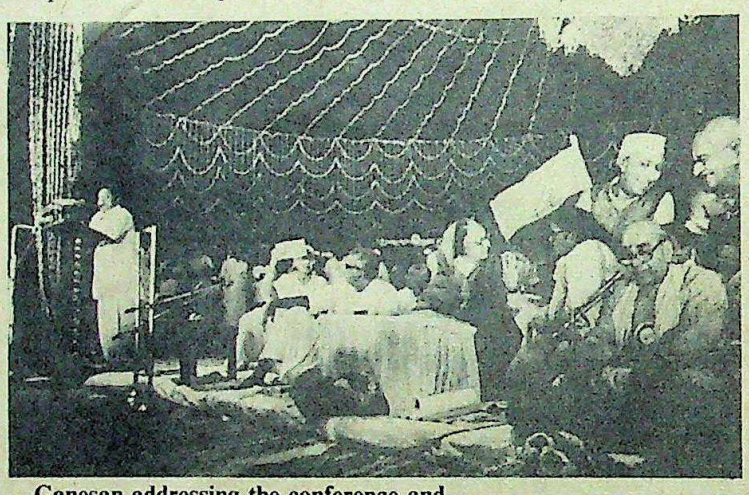
THE CONGRESS(I) has had an embarrassing time in south India with defeat after defeat in Periyakulam, Tiruchendur, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. But the party came to an even more humiliating realisation at the Southern Regional Conference of the party held in Madras last fortnight—its unstable hold over the region came not so much from regional parties as from factions in the Congress(I) itself. Admitted General Secretary C.M. Stephen: "The threat to us is only from within."

With even party members sensitive to the growing dissension in the party, the huge 67-ft cut-out poster of Mrs Gandhi that loomed over Madras as the conference began looked sadly ironic. The prime minister admitted as much. Said she in her speech on the concluding day: "Dissensions were there in the Congress Party even in the 1920s. We are open about this. But, please remember that the Congress is not just a political party, but a mass movement. There are bound to be some differences of opinion in it."

Just how deep those differences were was obvious from the wall posters plastered over the city. Most were warnings to general secretaries G.K. Moopanar and C.M. Stephen—"Do not interfere in party affairs in Tamil Nadu", "Do not create factions in Tamil Nadu". Asked former Tamil Nadu Congress Committe(I) (TNCC-I) president M.P. Subramaniam: "What is the use if the Congress(I) in Tamil Nadu has to be administered by Moopanar and Stephen from New Delhi?"

Elaborate Arrangements: The conference itself was immaculately planned and attended by over 3,000 delegates and hordes of rank and file party workers from all the four southern states and the Union Territory of Pondicherry. Congress(I) Working President Kamlapati Tripathi presided over the meet and General Secretary Rajiv Gandhi came right on time to deliver his speech. Yet the arrangements could not hide the absence of the M.P. Subramaniam faction, Rajya Sabha member and matinee idol Shivaji Ganesan, MP's Era Anbarasu, Senapathy Gounder, Durai Sebastian and MLA's N. Sundararaj and K.M. Thangamani. Explained Subramaniam: "Shivaji Ganesan was understandably upset that he wasn't consulted at all about the programme and arrangements for the conference, that too at a period when film actors are shooting to prominence in every political party. What is the purpose of just being named a member of the reception committee?"

The second day of the conference held yet more excitement. As soon as Mrs Gandhi landed at Meenambakkam Airport, Shivaji Ganesan and a number of MP's and MLA's who had come to receive her, demanded that she drop action on a show cause notice sent to Subramaniam. The notice had been sent because of his hard-hitting speech at the TNCC(I)'s general body meeting held at Madurai in November where he had criticised the interference of Moopanar and Stephen in state affairs.





Ganesan addressing the conference and (right) Subramaniam: causing problems

Then, as Mrs Gandhi boarded a jeep to drive into the city, a group of Congress(I) workers, including Nilgiri District Congress Committee(I) Secretary S.T. Gajapathy, squatted in front of the jeep and began shouting slogans like "Moopanar down down", "Stephen do not create factions".

Internal Differences: At the conference Shivaji sat in the front row and sulked. Despite repeated pleas to come on to the dais, the slighted superstar would not budge. When, finally, Stephen himself came down to call him, Shivaji reluctantly got up, much to the delight of his fans. Commented a member of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Council on Mrs Gandhi's insistence on mollifying the film star: "Inviting Shivaji to the stage is only to put up an appearance of cordiality before finally pulling the carpet from under his feet."

That internal differences in the party have become serious can no longer be hidden—despite the prime minister's assertion that "the problem of factionalism in the Congress(I) would be solved amicably". Subramaniam is not as hopeful. Said he: "There are a number of issues to be resolved. It is not just a question of the show cause notice, which, I understand, Mrs Gandhi is inclined to drop action on. There are other questions, like why has the party high command not done anything about R. Venkataraman being openly abused in the TNCC(I) office in Madras a couple of months ago." Said another prominent Congress(I) worker and lawyer: "Moopanar can survive only by suppressing M.P. Subramaniam."

The intense factionalism in the TNCC(I) dates back to the party's debacle in the Periyakulam Lok Sabha by-elections in 1982 when the Congress(I) candidate forfeited his deposit. The party had fought the election alone, avoiding alliances with both the AIADMK and the DMK on the advice of Subramaniam who was then TNCC(I) president. Soon afterwards Subramaniam paid the price of the defeat when he was removed from the presidentship. Moopanar and Stephen are said to have charged that Subramaniam was partial to the AIADMK.

Dissent Pattern: The situation is much the same in other south Indian states, as the Congress(I) leaders themselves admit. Said former Karnataka minister V. Basavalingappa at the conference: "My defeat in the assembly elections was only due to sabotage by a section of the party workers." There is the even greater power struggle between former Karnataka chief minister Gundu Rao and the leader of the state legislature party Veerappa Moily.

While Stephen boldly stated that "the Hegde Government has become a ripe apple and will fall off any time", a KPCC(I) executive member insisted that "there will be a real leadership crisis in our party if the Hegde Government collapses in the near future". Similarly in Andhra Pradesh, Bapi Raju, an MP from Krishna district, wondered why Channa Reddy and his men had chosen not to attend the conference.

Stephen, however, insisted on maintaining appearances. Said he: "It is the heart which holds the limbs together, and therefore strengthening the Centre is very important. Hegde and N.T. Rama Rao are wrong in interpreting their election victories as a sanction for regionalism."

—S.H. VENKATRAMAN

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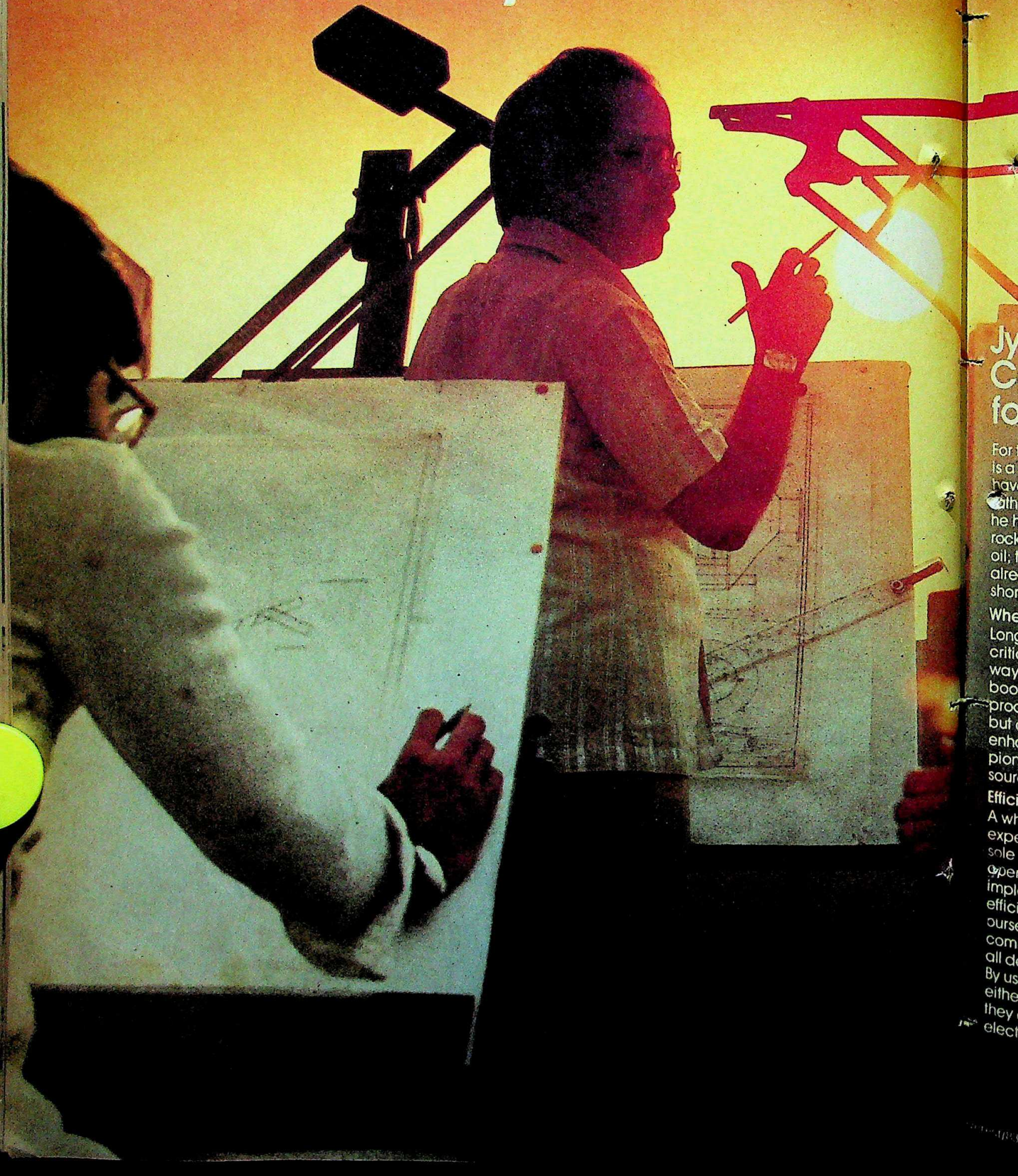
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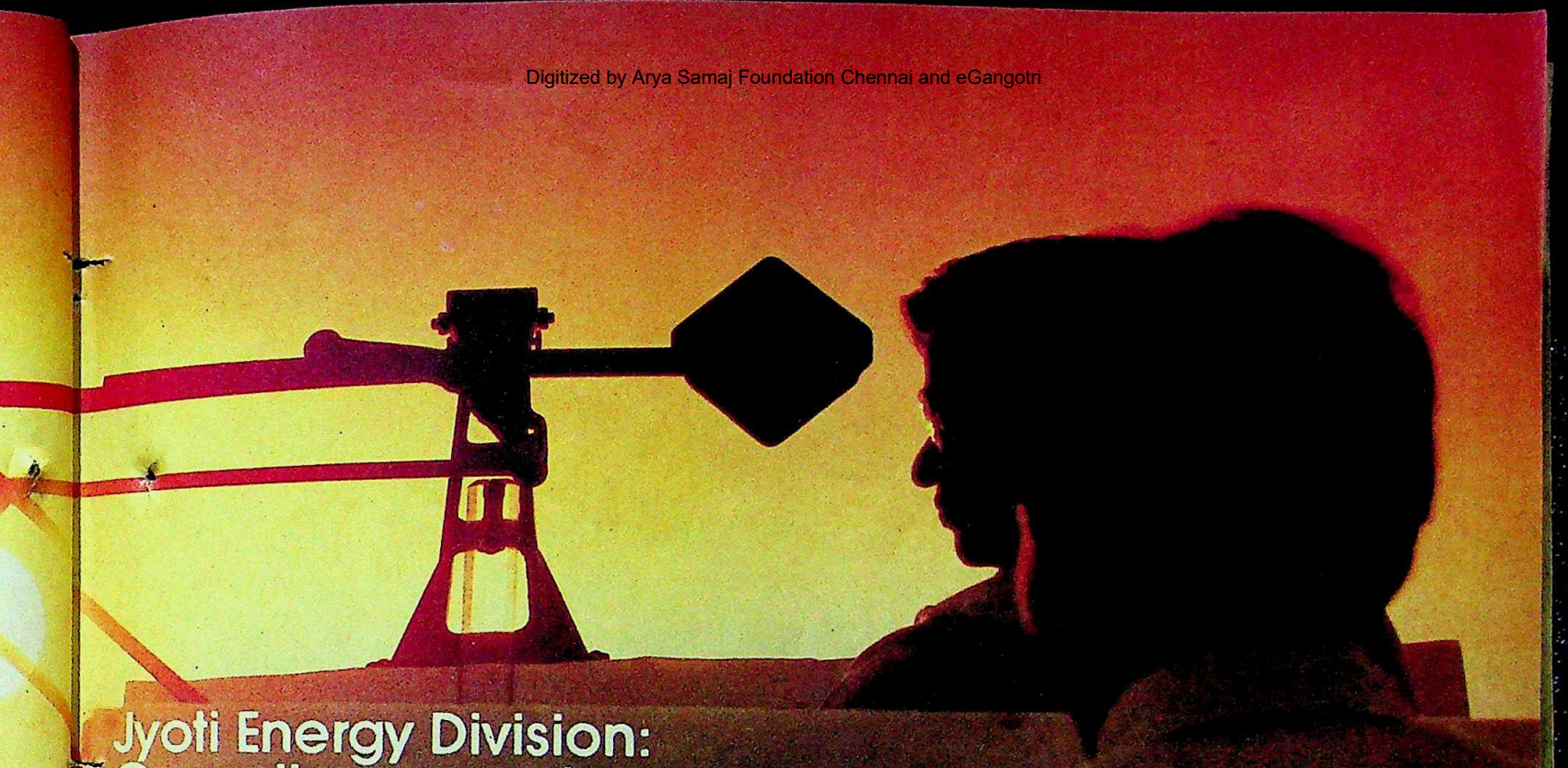
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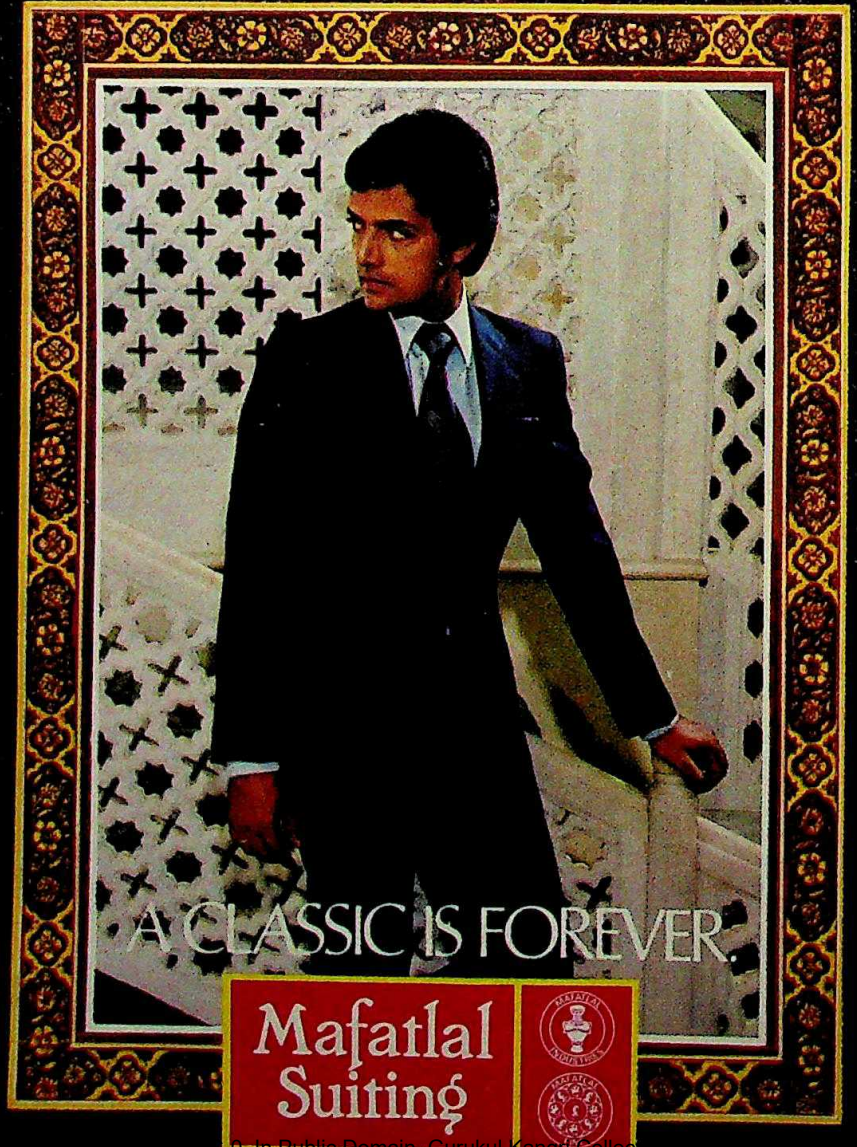


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DELHI

Diplomatic Imbroglio







The disputed site, Muldoon and Mrs Gandhi (left): tug of war

NEW ZEALAND's recent connection with India has been as the biggest exporter of beef tallow after the US and Australia. Now that dubious distinction has been made more dubious with a diplomatic snafu between the two countries, both of whom happen to be founding pillars of the Commonwealth establishment.

The controversy that has blown up concerns the future of a prime piece of real estate, measuring over 4 acres, that was allocated to the New Zealand Government to build their high commission in New Delhi's diplomatic enclave at Chanakyapuri. Back in the late 1950s when the properties were doled out to various countries wanting to establish permanent missions in India, they were sold for peanuts. Today, the large plot is almost invaluable—present market prices place its worth at anywhere between Rs 6 crore and Rs 8 crore.

The trouble started when the New Zealand Government decided to close down its mission in New Delhi in February last year—its rented offices in Golf Links and the high commissioner's grand bungalow on Aurangzeb Road downed their shutters—as a measure of economy. The Indian Government, taking note of the closure, promptly demanded the unbuilt property back. But the New Zealanders weren't prepared to let go: they had neither the money to maintain a mission in New Delhi, they said, nor could they consider returning the plot. The Ministry of External Affairs began correspondence with the New Zealand Government wanting to know what their intentions regarding the prized piece of real estate were. What finally put the ministry's back up were rumours that the New Zealand Government had been made a direct offer by the Canadian Government to purchase the property for a reported sum of US $2 million (Rs 2 crore).

No Plans: Although nothing came of the alleged negotiation, the property dispute lingers unresolved two years after the New Zealand mission closed. Speaking privately at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) last month, New Zealand Prime Minister Robert Muldoon reiterated that his Government had no immediate plans of reopening the mission as they simply couldn't afford it.

This seems unlikely. New Zealand is a small country, with a comparatively tiny population of 3.1 million people but just about two decades ago it boasted of a higher per capita income than Britain and Australia. Today, it spends lavishly on its social welfare programme—an estimated US $1.7 billion—and keeps up its style abroad equally lavishly. It spent approximately Rs 50 lakh annually to maintain its mission—manned by four career diplomats—in India. The high commissioner in New Delhi was concurrently accredited to Nepal and Bangaladesh.

Following their high commission's closure, New Zealand skipped the entire subcontinent with no mission between Teheran and Bangkok. This has not only been causing inconvenience to travellers from the subcontinent to New Zealand but more seriously affecting the population of about 15,000 immigrants of Indian origin in New Zealand, some of whom have settled there since the 1920s but maintain regular contact with India.

Still, the matter may have passed off peaceably had it not been for the property dispute in New Delhi and the lively controversy raked up in the New Zealand Parliament and press. At the time of the mission's closure, it was widely alleged in the New Zealand media that the move—which came together with such trivia as the closure of the New Zealand consulate in Toronto and the sacking of the prime minister's tea lady—was prompted neither by economic considerations nor diplomatic differences but professed of Muldoon's populist politics—and his dislike of Indira Gandhi which she heartily reciprocates.

Mutual Distrust: Muldoon and Mrs Gandhi have hardly kept their distrust of each other secret—she has staunchly disapproved of his support of the South African regime and he is said to have taken strong umbrage to her hobnobbing with the New Zealand opposition leader Bill Rowling during the 1981 Commonwealth meeting in Melbourne.

The reopening of the New Zealand High commission in New Delhi has assumed the proportions of a major political issue back in Wellington. Newspapers, acting in the interest of the Indian community, find it a convenient thorn in Muldoon's side and opposition leaders promise to place it in their manifestos in the forthcoming election in late 1984.

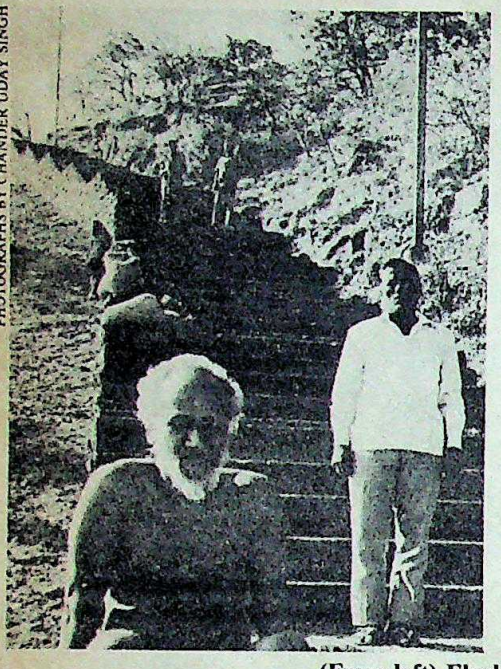
Meanwhile, officials in New Delhi are determined that under no circumstances will they allow New Zealand to sell the Chanakyapuri property behind their back. Nor can they take it back by force as the New Zealand Government clairns that it has only "temporarily" closed its mission in India. The controversy promises to drag on till an island people deep in the southern hemisphere go to the polls—only the election results far out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean will have direct bearing on the future of the prized piece of land situated on the tree-lined avenue of Chanakyapuri.

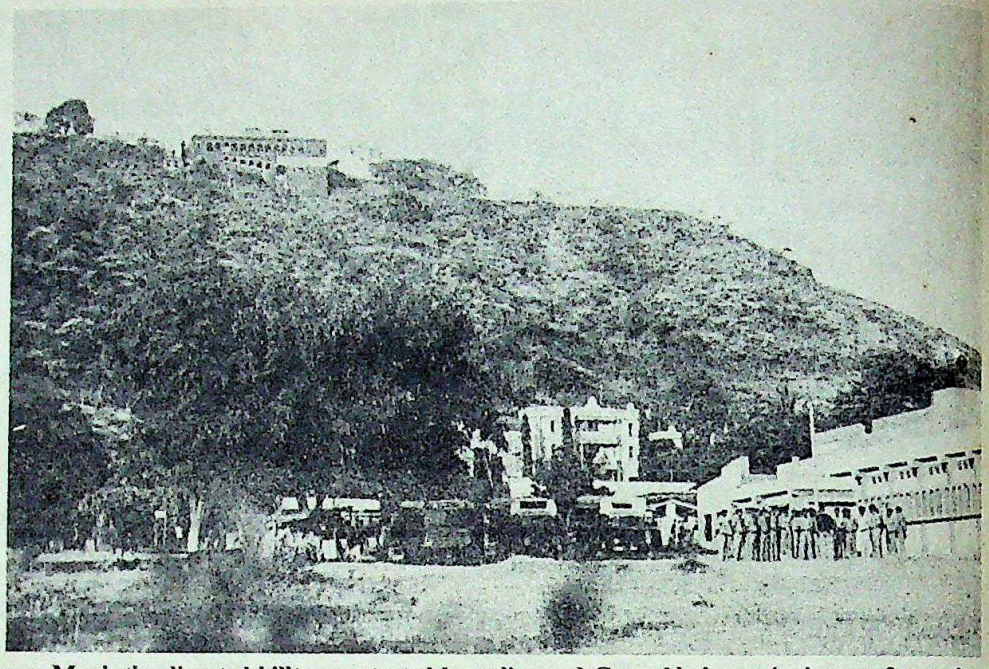
—SUNIL SETHI

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(From left) Elacharya Muni, the disputed hilltop protected by police and Gangabhai: continuing confrontation

MAHARASHTRA

Battle for Bahubali



A FEW DISPUTES over a mere two hectares of rocky hilltop could have attracted the nation-wide attention which was last fortnight focussed on Bahubali Dongar in southern Maharashtra. Escalating rapidly from a petty squabble between two Jain sects fighting an unseemly battle for control of the craggy table-top hill and its tiny temples, the Bahubali affair had grown into a national controversy with both Jain sects and the Hindus taking separate intransigent stands. Finally it took a 1,000-strong contingent of policemen to restore peace.

A series of confrontations over the past few months have transformed the sleepy religious centre in Kumbhoj-Nej village in Kolhapur district. Front-page reports in national dailies painted a bewildering picture of a Maratha-Jain conflict. Digambars around the country added to the confusion by taking out morchas all over Maharashtra and lobbying in New Delhi. In the end Mrs Gandhi responded to the persistent prodding by Digambar Jain Muni Elacharya Vidyanand and despatched a fact-finding team of four MP's to the pilgrim centre.

Counter Moves: The current controversy began when local Marathas demanded that a statue of Shivaji should be put up on the hill. The Marathas were emboldened to make their demand since they knew that they were supported by Shalinitai Patil, the chief minister's wife. Two years ago Shalinitai had visited Bahubali and is said to have supported Shwetambar demands. This time the Digambar Jains say that trouble started around the time Shalinitai was standing for election in the neighbouring Lok Sabha constituency of Sangli. They also charge that a group of Marathas threw stones and desecrated idols on the night of Shalinitai's election.

Elacharya Muni promptly retaliated by declaring a fast, and Digambars around the country launched silent morchas and protested in the state Assembly. Says Sharayu Daftary, industrialist from the prominent Walchand Hirachand family, who is also president of the Dakshin Bharat Jain Sabha: "It is the thinking behind the erection of the statue and not the statue itself which we are opposing." Daftary has been camping at Bahubali for almost six months. Another Digambar trustee Ajitkumar Karke claims that a Shwetambar named Rasiklal Shah has brought the Marathas into that picture "to get the backing of the Hindus and create tension and disharmony there".

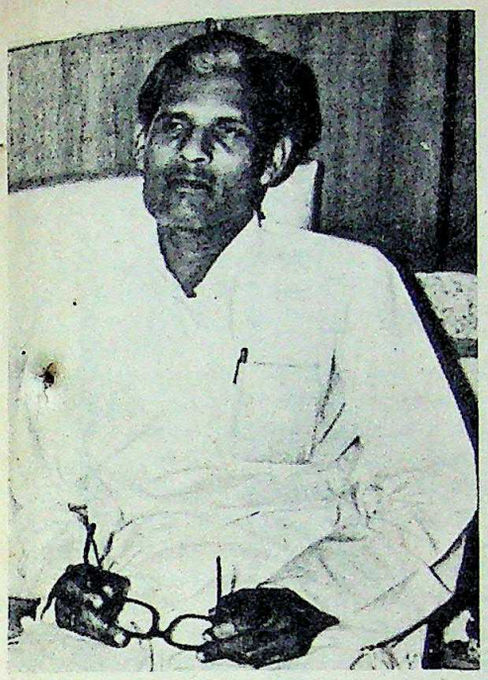
But while the proposed statue was a major new irritant it was clearly not the root cause of the problem. In fact, the Bahubali tangle traces its beginnings not to the recent Maratha-Jain conflict but to much older territorial squabbles between the Shwetambar and Digambar Jains. For over 100 years both the Shwetambar and Digambar temples have coexisted along with a Durga Mata temple granted by the erstwhile Kolhapur rulers to Harijans in the area on top of the Bahubali hill. But the two Jain sects have, however, been engaged in a constant dispute over temple and dharamsala ownership on the cramped hill.

Violent History: The Shwetambars blame the Digambars for the occasional eruptions of violence. Since the Digambars are in a majority—there are about 2 lakh Digambars in the region—and they outnumber the Hindus, they have in the past frequently been on the offensive. From the '40s to the present day many criminal cases and arbitration awards are said to have gone against them. Said Gangabhai S. Jain, honorary secretary of the Shwetambar Mandir Trust: "Starting in 1942, when they broke the turret of our temple, Digambars have repeatedly been guilty of violence and aggression against us and time and again they have used mob force for which they have been held guilty by courts and arbitrators. Their only intention is to somehow drive us out so that they can grab the whole hill." Shwetambar trustees insist that the arrival of Elacharya Muni at the onset of the last monsoon led to fresh tensions and increased attempts at land-grabbing by the Digambars.

The Shwetambars have also to bear their share of blame for violence. In 1973 they were the ones who pushed up tension between the sects a couple of notches when they decided to expand their temple-dharamsala onto a hectare of vacant land at the northern edge of the plateau. No sooner had they applied to the collector for the land than the Digambar Jains started systematic encroachments on land to establish ownership. And although government survey maps till as late as 1977 show that there were no

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structures on the vacant land, today Bahubali hill's northern end is studded with stone idols, samadhis, benches and concrete structures which Elacharya insists have been built to preserve property that has traditionally belonged to the Digambars.

When the Shivaji statue plan was announced, the Shwetambars saw their chance to weaken Digambar hold on Bahubali Dongar. The proposal gained force when Shalinitai, who was then revenue minister, promised to look into Maratha demands. Local Maratha and Shwetambar leaders have tried to use Shalinitai's and Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil's name to lend weight to their demands. In May the Shiv Smarak Samiti made a formal application to the collector for a land grant for the purpose.

THE DIGAMBARS argue that the statue campaign is malicious and completely uncalled for since Bahubali Dongar was not associated with the Maratha king while hundreds of other hills and fortresses were. But the campaign was used by Elacharya and his followers as an excuse for a renewed burst of unauthorised activity. Said Kolhapur Collector Dinkarrao Patil: "The structures on the vacant portion of the plateau are all new encroachments. The same Digambar leaders now laying claim to that land were signatories in 1977 to a survey map which clearly establishes that no structures existed on the plateau. These are all bogus, all humbug which they have done just to create a case for grabbing that land and they have defied government orders in the process."

Things came to a head soon after Patil's election when a 'victory procession' of 200 led by the Shiv Smarak Samiti marched up the hillside bursting crackers on the way. Although records of the accompanying police contingent show no incidents of violence, Digambars insist that stones were pelted at a Bahubali statue and the home of Samantbhadra Muni.

Quick Protest: The Digambar response was swift. On November 16 Elacharya announced a fast. A few days later his followers erected a fence around the encroached plateau and a gate on the access road to the hilltop. Arguing that both the road and the plateau belong to them anyway, and pleading that the Government was not taking any action when their "security was threatened" by the Smarak Samiti, Digambar leaders at Bahubali insist that the fencing was merely meant for self-protection, and that they were within their rights.

The move to block off the hill which houses the temples of the three communities are used by both Marathas and Shwetambars and a massive joint satyagraha at Bahubali was announced for December 16. Moving in with a massive contingent of police, the collector ordered the removal of the Digambar barriers by PWD workmen at midnight on December 15. Says Dinkarrao Patil: "They had absolutely no right to fence off government land and close the access road to communities which have had a right of way for over 100 years." The collector adds that "this action of the Elacharya created a major law and order problem in the district, since the Maratha Mahasangh had given an ultimatum that if these illegal encroachments were not removed they would remove them themselves to create their right of access."

Patil quotes from a huge pile of old government records to prove that Digambar claims on the Bahubali hill are baseless. Government survey settlements from 1897 to the present show uninterrupted possession of the Government though the existence of Shwetambar and Digambar temples is recorded.

But the confusing welter of facts, figures and documents was not making the task of finally settling the matter any easier, and at end-fortnight there seemed to be little improvement in the Bahubali crisis. The scene of action had shifted to Delhi where Vasantdada Patil was summoned by Mrs Gandhi to arrive at a formula for settling the dispute but it appeared unlikely that even a high command order would go beyond the immediate question of the Shivaji statue. For the Shwetambars and Digambars, both of whom are ironically subjects of a religion based on peace and non-violence, the 100-year-old dispute is likely to go on as before.

—CHANDER UDAY SINGH

MADHYA PRADESH

High Hopes



IF LAWS were all that were needed to wipe out corruption, Madhya Pradesh would be one of the cleanest states in the country. Early last month Chief Minister Arjun Singh proposed an amendment to the already draconian Madhya Pradesh Specific Corrupt Practices Act. Under the suggested provisions if a government officer has property disproportionate to his known sources of income, it will be presumed that it has been acquired by illegal means. Moreover, district magistrates will be able, after consulting an advisory board, to attach the officer's property.

Arjun Singh's belief that he can legislate corruption out of existence is touching if nothing else. But he has little to base his



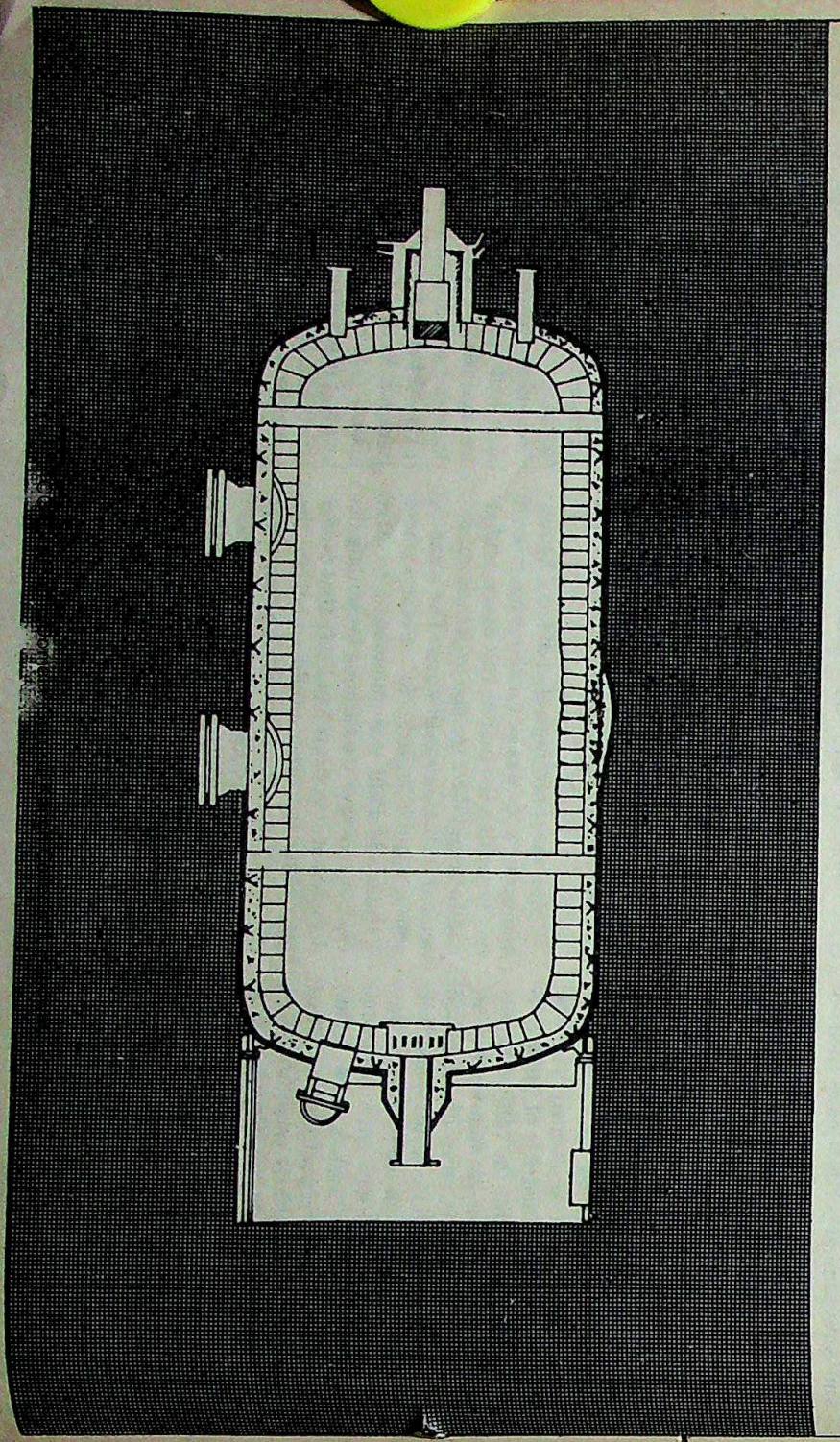
HARI OM GULATI

Arjun Singh: posing as a crusader

belief on. The act which was introduced with a lot of fanfare in September 1982, has hardly ever been used in the last one year. In fact in a state with 6 lakh state government servants till the end of September, only 150 cases had actually been filed. Of these half are against illegal colonisers and licensed dealers. And half have been filed in three districts—34 in Indore, 24 in Ratlam and 12 in Bilaspur. In the remaining 42 districts, only about 75 cases have been registered making an average of two in each district. In some districts like Sehore, Betul and Hoshangabad not even one case had been registered until September 30, 1983. And in the state capital Bhopal, where the Government sits, not a single case has been filed under the act.

At the moment only 35 cases have reached the court under the act. And in departments like the Irrigation Department

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where corruption is said to be widespread not a single case has been filed yet. While the act deals specifically with the denudation of forests, stating that an officer will be held guilty if the forest under his jurisdiction suffers, "on account of his omission to supervise, prevent or report, the illegal felling of trees" fewer than 10 cases have been registered.

Grandiose Claims: This was hardly what was expected when the Government brought the act on the statute books in September 1982. A press note of that time described it as 'revolutionary' and added that it sought "to tackle boldly the cancerous evils of corruption, malpractices, misutilisation of public funds." Speaking on AIR Arjun Singh went further describing it as "an ordinance by which corruption and misconduct would receive a severe blow."

While the claims may have been unjustified, there is no doubt that the Specific Corrupt Practices Act was an exceptionally stringent piece of legislation. While it is aimed primarily at government servants it also deals with practically every form of corruption and provides jail sentences for all kinds of crimes. For example, using substandard materials in construction could send both contractor and supervisory officers to jail for up to three years. A forest officer's failure to report illegal felling of trees could land him in jail for anywhere between one and three years. Similarly there are jail sentences for a wide range of offences like the registering of bogus firms, sanctioning loans to fictitious persons, tampering with the public distribution system and for illegal colonisation. It even prescribed the death sentence for bootleggers who supplied killer hooch.

For all this the act has hardly had any impact. It appears to have been little more than a publicity gimmick by a chief minister who is overly keen to project himself as a crusader against corruption.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

WEST BENGAL

Miscalculation



THE POLITICAL battle between the ruling Left Front in West Bengal and the Congress(I) spilt over into the campus of Calcutta University last fortnight. Even though the opposition nominee Santosh Bhattacharya secured the highest number of first preference votes from the Senate members in the election for appointment of the vice-chancellor, 40 votes against the 35 cast in favour of Ramen Poddar, the Front candidate and present vice-chancellor, the state Government has staked its claim to the post.

Though the Left Front enjoys a clear majority in the Senate, its calculations went awry for two reasons. Its Front partner the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), annoyed that all three candidates were Marxist nominees, did not vote for them. And, the tricky calculation of preferential and transferable votes apparently confused the Marxists.

While the Congress(I) claimed victory, Education Minister Sambhu Ghosh pointed out immediately after the announcement of results that the votes of all the three Left Front candidates taken together showed that they had a clear majority in the Senate. Ghosh's claim was further strengthened when 78 members of the 143-strong Senate sent a memorandum to the Chancellor demanding that Poddar be retained in the post.

While the Chancellor A.P. Sharma, who is also the state governor, took time to make up his mind, Vice-Chancellor Poddar said: "All this controversy is taking place because some people dislike me strongly. For good reason because I have taken some measures which have badly affected their vested interests in Calcutta University."



Sharma: taking his time

Impartial Administrator: For decades Calcutta University had been in a mess with examinations often delayed for years, results taking as long as a year to be announced, question papers leaked out and marksheets tampered with. One of the first things Poddar did when he became vice-chancellor four years ago was to appoint a commission to inquire into the goings-on in the Department of Controller of Examinations.

Following its recommendations he dismissed a number of officials and employees. This had an immediate impact and in the last few years exams are being held more or less on schedule and results are being announced in two to three months time. The introduction of computers has put paid to the manipulation of marksheets.

While students and parents have generally welcomed these moves, the power groups in the university, including teachers and employees, have taken up arms against Poddar, constantly demanding his resignation. At one point, Poddar who makes no secret of his Marxist sympathies, was even

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accused of brainwashing students with the introduction of a new syllabus. But this charge was dropped when the Supreme Court ruled against it.

According to Poddar, yet another reason for his unpopularity is because he "changed the system of recruitment of non-teaching employees. Previously there was a quota system which benefited everybody from vice-chancellor downwards to get in their own men. I have put a stop to this and in the process naturally made many enemies."

The charge of partisanship levelled against Poddar by his detractors also does not seem convincing in view of the fact that many of the teachers promoted during the past few years include many who are politically opposed to him like Vishnu Dutt Shastri, the new professor of Hindi who belongs to the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Confidence Test: However, inspite of the acknowledged good work that he has put in to clean at least part of the mess in the university, Poddar found himself last fortnight in the unenviable position of being second in the numbers game. With many newspapers interpreting it as an indication of the lack of confidence in him, Poddar retorted in defence: "Surely the decision about that does not rest with some swollen-headed pseudo-intellectuals in newspaper offices." According to Poddar's interpretation of the law, the Senate has to send a panel of three names to the chancellor and he will take the decision in consultation with the state Government and the "question of who has got what votes is totally immaterial".

That also appears to be the state Government's view, and last fortnight the question that loomed large was whether the chancellor would also agree similarly. For if he does not, then it will mean the confrontation between the Congress(I), Governor A.P. Sharma and the Left Front will lead to a deadlock as the state education minister is firm in his contention that the governor will have to abide by the wishes of the Cabinet.

While Raj Bhavan has remained silent on the issue, sources in Calcutta University pointed out that if Poddar is not reappointed then there will be a stalemate in the university itself. The Left enjoys two-thirds majority in the Senate and they will certainly make it difficult for anybody else whom the chancellor might wish to appoint, and in this case it is Bhattacharya.

The battle lines have been drawn and as Poddar himself said: "The controversy will not end even after the chancellor makes his decision known. This is bad for an academic institution." However, now there is no way in which the academic atmosphere can be prevented from getting further sullied by an ugly controversy.

—SUMANTA SEN

ORISSA

Trying Times



ORISSA Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik, heading a faction-riven ministry, can hardly be unaware of how shaky his government is. When Congress(I) General Secretary Rajiv Gandhi suddenly cancelled his proposed visit to the state, he also realised just how tenuous his hold on the ministry was.

Rajiv's visit was for Patnaik the perfect opportunity to boost his image, to show the state just how powerful he really is. When Rajiv failed to show up, things started to crack up at once. The dissidents in the Congress(I) Legislature Party (CLP)—pacified in a jerry-built reconciliation two months ago—began grumbling again.

For days before Rajiv was due, Patnaik and his supporters had been carefully planning the details of his trip—which was to include a visit to almost all the coastal districts, addressing over two dozen public meetings and attending a conference of party workers in the state capital. According to party sources, the dissidents and their leader—Union Minister of State for Chemicals and Fertilisers Ram Chandra Rath—had "foiled" Patnaik's efforts to project himself to the public as the all-powerful leader of the state.





J.B. Patnaik (left) and Rath: poles apart

What was worse was that some of Patnaik's own supporters, including state party chief Nityananda Mishra, would have been as annoyed if Rajiv's visit had come through as Patnaik was that it had not. This was because Rajiv's tour map had excluded many important districts including the sensitive western parts of the state. Said a Congress(I) legislator: "If the trip was allowed to materialise, it would have done more harm to the party than good in the future as everybody knows how deep-rooted are the differences between the people of the western and coastal districts."

At about the same time, the gulf between the chief minister and Governor B.N. Pande—never very close in any case—widened even more. While Patnaik tried to cover up Rajiv's cancellation by insisting that he was too preoccupied with the south, Pande reportedly filed a detailed report to the Centre complaining about the ministry. Pande's antipathy to the Patnaik ministry is an open secret.

Understandably, the chief minister has his own grievances with the governor as well. His supporters feel Pande's critical approach is "anti-government", and at a legislature party meeting recently, some even criticised him openly. They were further annoyed when the governor accepted an invitation to unveil the statue of former chief minister Rajendra Narayan Singhdeo on a college campus, since he belonged to the Swatantra Party. Pande had to finally cancel his programme. Moreover, he has annoyed Patnaik because of his friendship with Shyam Sunder Mahapatra—MP and a staunch anti-Patnaik lobbyist in Delhi—and with prominent dissident Ram Chandra Rath.

Even more annoying to them is Pande's praise for Radhanath Rath, a long-time politician and veteran journalist whose newspaper *Samaja* is critical of the Government. One powerful minister went to the extent of alleging that Radhanath Rath was trying to destabilise the Government.

Meeting Points: Panicking at the deteriorating situation, Patnaik rushed to Delhi to persuade Rajiv to visit Orissa. Ram Chandra Rath flew to Bhubaneswar to talk to the dissidents. And meanwhile, many of Patnaik's loyal supporters moved closer to former chief minister Nandini Satpathy—who is all ready to rejoin the Congress(I) and is closer to Pande—and assured her of their support.

In an attempt to refurbish the image of the Government, Patnaik had initiated a clean-up drive in the administration and an enquiry into the Rs 1 crore bungling in the gram dal purchase under the Special Nutrition Programme. Now, in a desperate and perhaps last minute move to woo the dissidents, the PCC(I) on December 22 named Union Minister of State for Defence K.P. Singhdeo and four others—including dissident leader Kanhu Charan Lenka and MP Banmalibabu as special invitees besides making 15 others coopted members of the PCC(I). But that obvious attempt at pacification is unlikely to put an end to the chief minister's woes.

—FARZAND AHMED

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PUNJAB

Violent Ways



THE EXTREMISTS in the Akali movement are vying for the limelight. Last fortnight Sukhdev Singh, the leader of one of the less well-known Akali groups, the Babbar Khalsa, proudly stepped out of the shadows to claim credit for the killing of 35 Nirankaris. Sukhdev Singh was unrepentant about his group's bloody activities, saying, "We shall continue to deal the same way with the enemies of the panth."

The Babbar Khalsa's efforts to project itself as the most radical of all the extremist groups have pushed moderate Akalis back onto the defensive. For months now they have been adamantly maintaining that no criminals are sheltering in the Golden Temple complex. Only morcha dictator Harchand Singh Longowal has made a feeble effort to disown the Babbars. His efforts to distance himself, however, drew a sharp retort from Sukhdev Singh who contemptuously dismissed him as a "meek leader".

Careful Silence: Other Sikh leaders like Prakash Singh Badal and Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) President Gurcharan Singh Tohra have maintained a studied silence over Sukhdev Singh's revelations. The fact is that the Babbar Khalsa have been supporting the Akali 'holy war' for over a year and even Longowal was not unaware of their existence. Second-ranking leaders are, however, less reticent than their bosses and condemn the Babbar Khalsa's activities roundly. Says Basant Singh Khalsa, an Akali MLA: "It is really very embarrassing for us to have such people in the complex."

The Babbar Khalsa are not the only ones to come out openly in favour of violence. They were beaten to the draw by Bibi Amarjit Kaur, the stocky domineering schoolteacher who is the leader of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha. Amarjit Kaur has been an implacable foe of the Nirankaris ever since her husband was slain in a clash with them in 1978. Amarjit Kaur also minced no words when speaking to the press recently, saying that "there was nothing wrong in these killings (the Nirankaris) that have taken place". And being a deeply religious woman she quotes from the Sikh scriptures to justify her stand. She now looks after the children of Sikhs who have died in the last five years. She, however, condemns the killing of innocent Hindus, saying "no Sikh could commit such a heinous crime". Amarjit Kaur and the Babbar Khalsa make little effort to hide their contempt for Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. In fact, Amarjit Kaur says darkly about Bhindranwale: "The time will come when you will know."

It was the Babbar Khalsa's dislike of Bhindranwale that triggered the other big confrontation of the fortnight. The row began when the followers of the Babbar Khalsa moved into two rooms in the Guru Nanak Niwas. The Babbar Khalsa and the All India Sikh Students' Federation (AISSF), which is loyal to Bhindranwale, have often exchanged blows and this time after the trouble started Bhindranwale promptly gave the Babbars a four-hour deadline to move out. But coming as it did at a time when tempers were high, his ultimatum aroused only ridicule. Said Sukhdev Singh: "The Niwas is nobody's monopoly. We too have been allotted the rooms by the SGPC."

Sudden Retreat: When Bhindranwale realised that bloodshed was imminent and that Longowal seemed disinclined to interfere in the matter he abruptly decided to make a temporary retreat. He even went to great lengths to urge his followers to keep calm and urged newsmen not to over-react. He announced dramatically in a voice quivering with emotion that he was "prepared for the supreme sacrifice for the sake of the panth. The morcha belongs to no individual and I will continue to make my contribution."

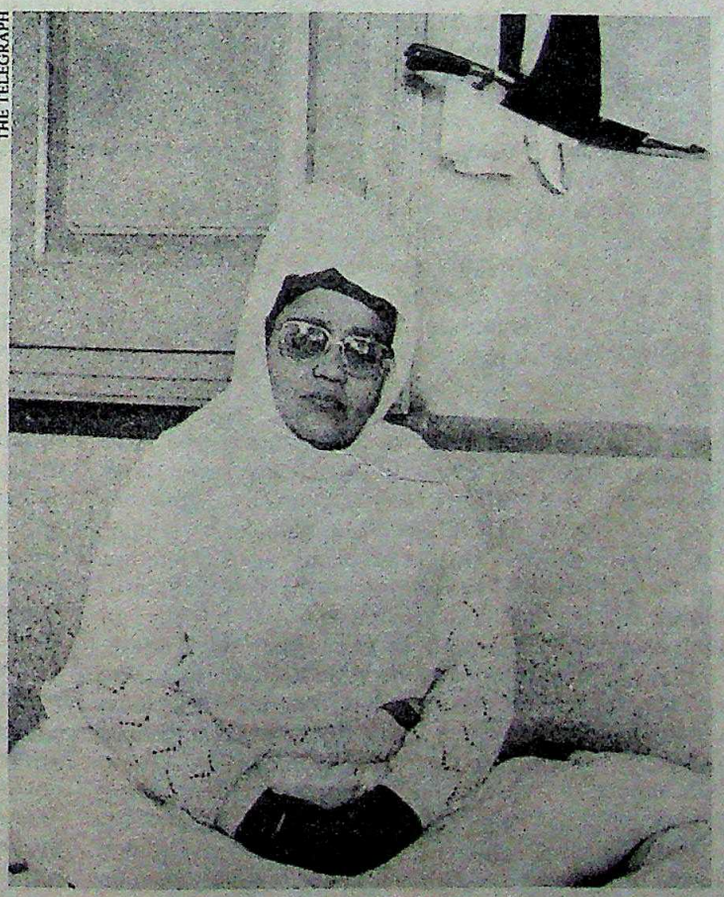
But as Bhindranwale led his followers away to the security of the Akal Takht inside the Golden Temple, his foes seized on his retreat to put out the story that he was sheltering there out of fear for his own safety. Bhindranwale had of late been spending some nights in the Akal Takht after persistent rumours that the Government planned to round up extremists staying in the Guru Nanak Niwas. His rapid departure seemed to many to be an indication that his move had been planned in advance. Bhindranwale's supporters allege that Longowal was also not displeased by the turn of events. They pointed out that Longowal has not yet asked Bhindranwale to return to the Niwas.

The dispute between the Babbar Khalsa and Bhindranwale was not the only indication of the subterranean rifts in the Akali movement. There has always been talk of violence in the Guru Nanak Niwas and last fortnight came rumours that a retired air force corporal Santokh Singh, a militant Akali, had vanished from there recently. His father Sohan Singh complained both to the police and the SGPC about his son's disappearance.

As always, the demoralised police force are declining to take any action about either Santokh Singh's disappearance or even about Sukhdev Singh's inflammatory rantings. They only action they have taken against Sukhdev Singh is to register a case against him. Beyond that the only statement on the whole affair has been Governor B.D. Pande's request to the Akalis to hand over criminals staying in the Golden Temple. Says Inspector General of Police Pritam Singh Bhindar: "We presently have no action plan. How can we arrest the wanted men unless we enter the Golden Temple, and we are not thinking of that yet."

Bhindranwale, meanwhile, has started holding court on the roof of the Guru Ram Das Langar, a newly built red stone community kitchen where 10,000 people can be fed at one sitting. He has scorned a call by Tohra to return to the Niwas, saying, "I am better off at the feet of my first warrior guru." But while people are still thronging to see the maverick leader, there is no doubt that he has lost some of his lustre.

—GOBIND THUKRAL



THE TELEGRAPH

Amarjit Kaur: justifying murder

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MAHARASHTRA

Naxalite Influx



FOR TWO months now, 180 members of the Special Reserve Police (SRP) have been combing the thick bamboo and teak jungles of Gadchiroli, at the eastern end of Maharashtra. They are in search of small bands of Naxalites, which since the monsoons have significantly increased their activities—and influence—in the region. Gradually over the past two years, the Naxalites have filtered over the border from Andhra Pradesh, where they have had a strong base for many years. Members of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI-ML) these extremists owe their loyalty to Kondappali Seetaramiah, presently in jail in Andhra Pradesh.

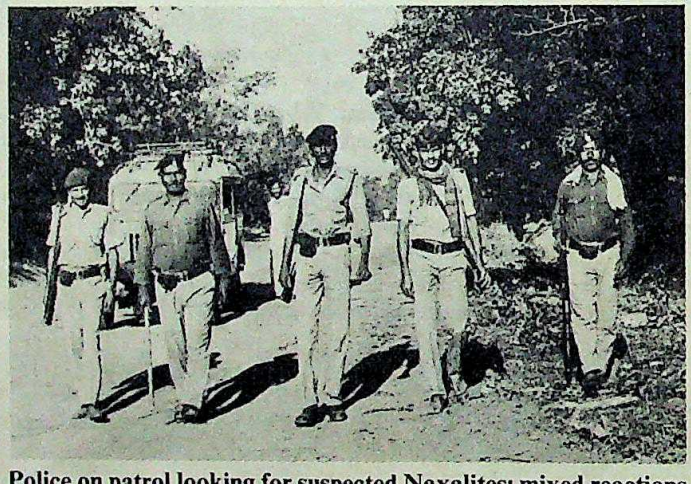
While the authorities have had no success so far in their massive man-hunt—an SRP man admitted that "the villagers never inform us even if they know where they are"—the fame and popularity of the Naxalite groups are increasing in this backward Adivasi belt, criss-crossed by rivers and far removed from civilisation.

The Naxalites move in squads of eight, some of which even have girls. Clad in olive green pants and woollen khaki shirts with matching caps and thick boots, they blend with the greenery of the forest and from a distance, resemble soldiers in battle fatigues. Each carries a 12 bore gun and several own pistols. Living out in the open, the Naxalites move from village to village and hold meetings to lecture the local population on their rights and to assure the tribals of protection from any government servant who tries to take advantage of them.

Local Popularity: Villagers in Ettapally district talk of the Naxalites only in hushed voices and feign ignorance when confronted by the authorities. But when pressed, a few open up to admit their secret respect for the intruders from Andhra Pradesh who have brought about a major change in their lives. Children in the villages have even begun to sing songs—in Telugu and Marathi—taught by the Naxalites. Says Raje Gowde, a schoolgirl from Arewade village: "I know they are carrying guns but they are helping local people a lot."

A schoolteacher of the Ettapally region adds that the harassment of the Adivasis and the demand for petty bribes has decreased drastically with the arrival of the Naxalites. "No forest officer dares to ask for chicken or liquor any more," he says, but adds: "It is like a spring action. The moment they leave the local government servants resort to their old ways. This is no long-term solution."

This year in Ettapally, the Naxalites played a crucial role in raising the rate for tendu leaf collection for bidis. When the contractors from the south insisted on paying at the old rate of Rs 6 a day, the villagers went on strike and everyone refused to pick. The Naxalites not only encouraged the Adivasis to hold out for their demands but assured them protection for cutting the wood required for their genuine fuel needs. Eventually, while some bidi contractors left the region, others agreed to increase the rate to Rs 11 per day. The rate for bamboo cutting has also shot up Similar increase in rates took place earlier in the Sironcha zone.



Police on patrol looking for suspected Naxalites: mixed reactions

Organised Network: The Gadchiroli Superintendent of Police, K. Subramanyan, while conceding the presence of the Naxalites, insists that there are just a few. "A small spill-over from Andhra Pradesh who have taken shelter in the jungle," says he but both local residents and Naxalites have a different story. There are four squads in Maharashtra—two in Sironcha on the Andhra Pradesh border, one in Aheri on Gadchiroli's southern tip and one in Ettapally. In neighbouring Bastar in Madhya Pradesh, too, there were two squads. By now, the Andhra Naxalites have recruited four local people—two girls and one boy in Aheri and one matriculate tribal in Sironcha.

The Naxalites work in close interaction with the villagers. A remote village in the Ettapally district wears a deserted look as everyone has gathered in the afternoon sun to listen to the Naxalites. After lecturing to them on the evils of human sacrifice, they inform them that they will announce whom to vote for in the elections next year. Though initially suspicious of outsiders, once they open up, they are forthright.

While two keep guard and the bearded commander sits silently by, the soft-spoken deputy commander, Rajan, speaks of the hard life in the malaria-infested area. Like most of the group, he has been a college student. The rest are uneducated peasants. "We sleep in the open and get food from the villagers but till the people's war succeeds we must continue our struggle, "says Rajan. In addition to the barest necessities, their tiny haversacks contain a pile of literature on the movement in both English and Marathi.

Violent Methods: Though the threat of violence is implicit in their talk and they move around heavily armed, even local authorities are willing to concede that the use of force by the groups in Maharashtra has been minimal. In Sironcha, the Naxalites cut off the arm of a teacher who had reportedly been a police informer and who had been warned earlier. Photographs of the teacher's cut arm have been shown by the Naxalites to the villagers to make their message clear.

In Ettapally, two months back, the tehsildar was thrashed in front of the entire village of Jambia for having raped a village woman. The Naxalites first offered the man the alternative of touching the woman's feet and asking for her forgiveness. When he refused, they delivered a severe beating in public view. The authorities concede knowledge of the Jambia incident but note that since the tehsildar merely asked for an immediate transfer, they learnt of it belatedly.

The local grape-vine says that in order to buy peace, forest contractors have been meeting the Naxalites' demands for money, temporary use of jeeps and guns. Says Rajan: "The villagers are only in a position to supply us food and we would not ask more of them. We need money to buy guns. But we only made our demands this year after the rate for tendu picking was fixed." Rumours persist that the major company near Chandrapur has been asked to provide guns from West Bengal for the terrorists.

While attitudes towards the Naxalites remain mixed among the non-Adivasis, most concede that even if unethical, their methods are still getting results. Said one: "We could not wipe out corruption in 10 years by addressing numerous letters to the collector and other authorities. The Naxalites have achieved better results in 10 months."

—COOMI KAPOOR

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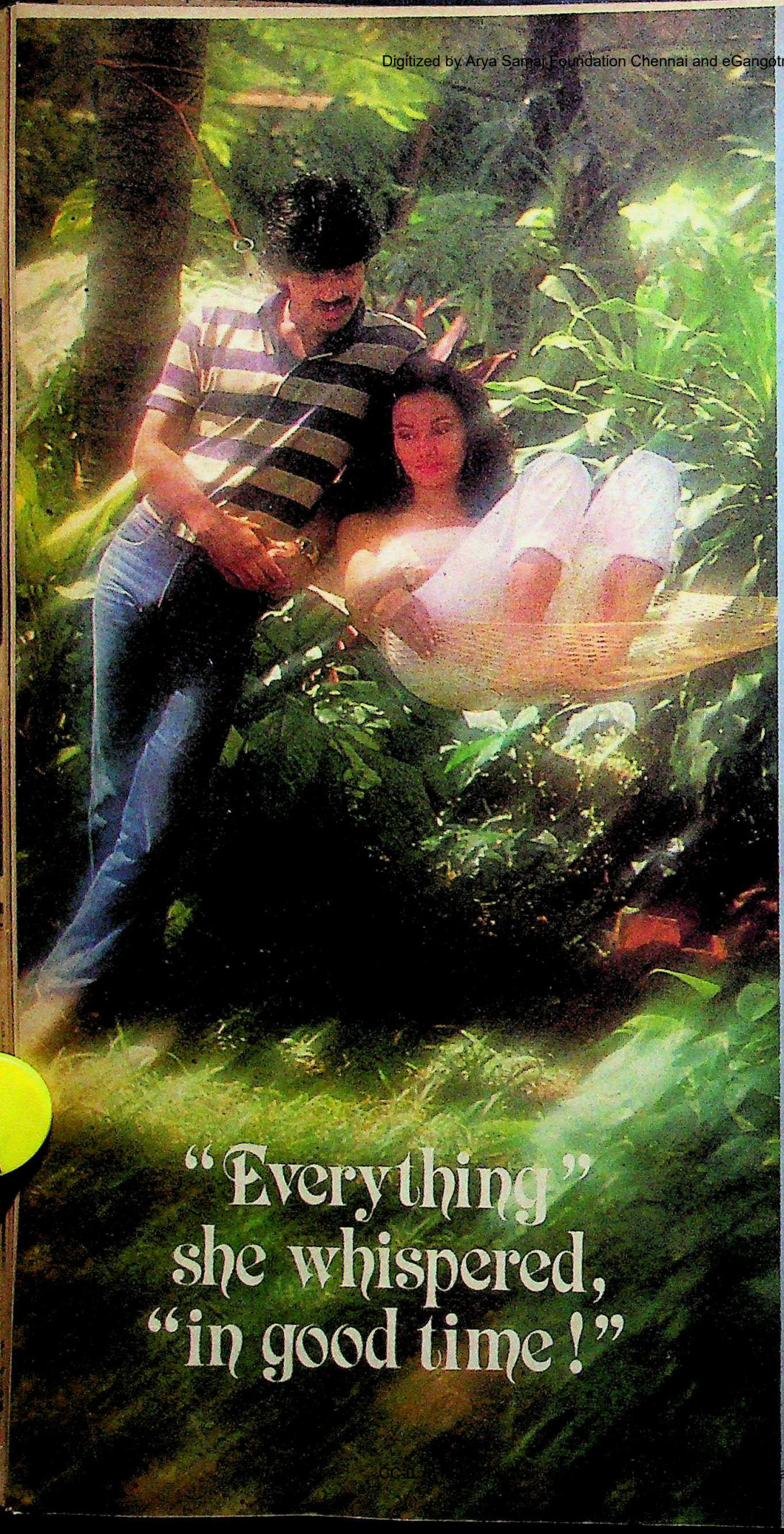
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"Everything" she whispered, "in good time!"

"Ours is a fairytale romance"
she observed.
"Why" she said,
sensing his amusement,
"can you think of a better way
to start our story
than that classic line.....
once upon a time?!"
"You're right, as usual" he said,
"ours has always been a case
of perfect timing.
Remember that first party.
There we were, two punctual people....."
"Too punctual for everyone else!"
she quipped.
They had never met before.
But at once they had seen
that they had something in common.
He saw it.
She saw it.
"You've got a remarkable HQ"
they said to each other,
almost in unison.
There always was something uncanny
about their timing. Or was it HMT's?
"I never go out with anything else",
he informed her.
"Glad to hear it" she said lightly,
"I think the best of times
is meant to stay!"
Somehow, after that it was
only natural that they should
spend so much time together.
"There's nothing I like better
than relaxing like this.
Thinking of times gone by.
Planning for times to come...."
she mused.
"I would have thought" he said,
a little surprised, "that there was
no time like the present".
"Unquestionably" she said.
Losing no time in agreeing!

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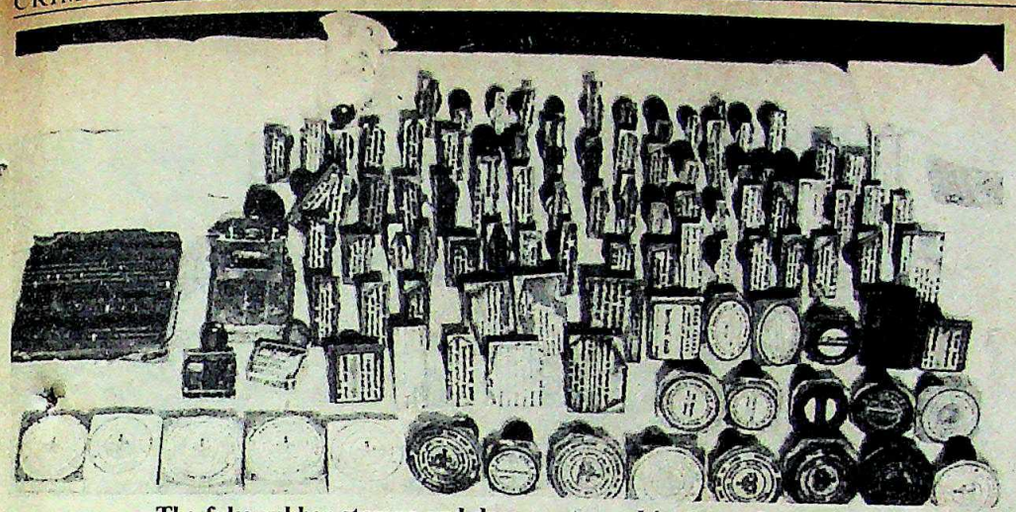


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The fake rubber stamps and documents used in the racket and (right) accused Ramaswamy: meticulous fraud

BANGALORE

Improvident Funds

THE CRIME was unusual, to say the least. Last fortnight when police raided a small house near Bangalore's sprawling Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) complex, they claimed to have caught a gang that has helped hundreds of employees of HAL and Indian Telephone Industries (ITI) siphon out Rs 1.34 crore from the two companies. But more unusual than the sum involved was the fact that the employees were stealing from themselves.

The racket was apparently a very simple one. Whenever employees of the two companies found themselves strapped for cash all they had to do was to get in touch with agents who operated in the factory. For a small fee, ranging from Rs 350 to Rs 3,500 the agents gave them all the documents to prove that they were building a house and needed an advance from their provident fund to finish construction work.

Well-equipped: Police say that the mastermind of the racket was a former HAL employee, M. Ramaswamy, who left the company under a cloud. When they raided Ramaswamy's house the police say they stumbled on a complete kit needed to commit the frauds. First of all there were 101 rubber stamps from every possible government land authority ranging from tehsildars and sub-registrars to the chairman of the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA). There were hundreds of house plans and bank receipts.

Most staggering were the sheaves of forms for every conceivable land deal—BDA possession certificates, bank challan forms, deeds of rights for village lands, and corporation building licence forms. Says K. Srinivas Alva, deputy commissioner of police, "Barring the stamp paper used, every single document obtained from the premises is bogus."

The raid gave the police all the evidence they needed. Soon afterwards they followed it up by arresting three of Ramaswamy's employees. They then swooped on two nearby printing presses where they claimed to have seized blocks and printed forms. The police then turned their dragnet to pull in four 'contact agents', two from ITI and two from HAL. All were charged with cheating and forgery. The employees have also been accused of using the forged documents to obtain house-building loans. Many of them claim that they did not know that the certificates were bogus, though they admit that they do not have sites or building plans.

Detailed Records: Ramaswamy was, according to the police, running a meticulously organised racket. So meticulous, in fact, that he simplified the work of the police. He kept detailed records listing the employees whom he had supplied documents to, how much they had taken from the company, how much commission they had paid and which agent had brought in the business.

With a few exceptions the tales of the employees are more pathetic than anything else. Examples:

► M. Muniyappa, who has worked 23 years for HAL, took a Rs 15,000 loan. He spent Rs 8,000 to get two of his 11 children married. He paid about Rs 3,000 for a cow and Rs 3,000 as commission for the loan;

► V.D. Venugopal of HAL was approached by somebody in his own division and persuaded to take a Rs 21,000 loan. He spent Rs 10,000 on his sister's wedding, and used the rest to pay off the agent and to clear debts that he ran up when the factory was on strike;

► A. Annamalai also from HAL, received a loan of Rs 27,500; he paid the agent Rs 3,500 and used the rest to cover debts incurred during the strike and to pay for the medical treatment of his wife;

► R. Chandrasekhar, a HAL employee, got Rs 18,000 but does not even know where the house that he is supposed to be building is. Chandrasekhar admits he has spent the money without getting any worthwhile returns from it.

The management of the two companies got wind of the massive swindles some time ago after they were tipped off about it anonymously. Investigation at the site indicated by the employees in their application showed that there were no houses there. But nothing could be established at the time and the 300 beneficiaries were let off with reprimands and ordered to return the loans.

The provident fund racket apparently began when the two companies liberalised their rules in October 1981 and allowed employees to claim the companies' share of their provident fund if they were building houses. Almost overnight the requests for loans from the two companies went up. In ITI the number of applications rose from 500 a year to 5,582 between December 1981 and November 1983. Of these M.K. Venkataraman, ITI general manager (finance), says that 1,552 were found to be irregular. In one extreme case three or four people were claiming to be building on the same site.

In HAL the story is much the same. Between 1981 and 1983 5,391 employees applied for loans and 1,257 were rejected. HAL has now tightened up its rules drastically. One officer, however, says helplessly: "How can we check if every document looks so authentic but is forged?"

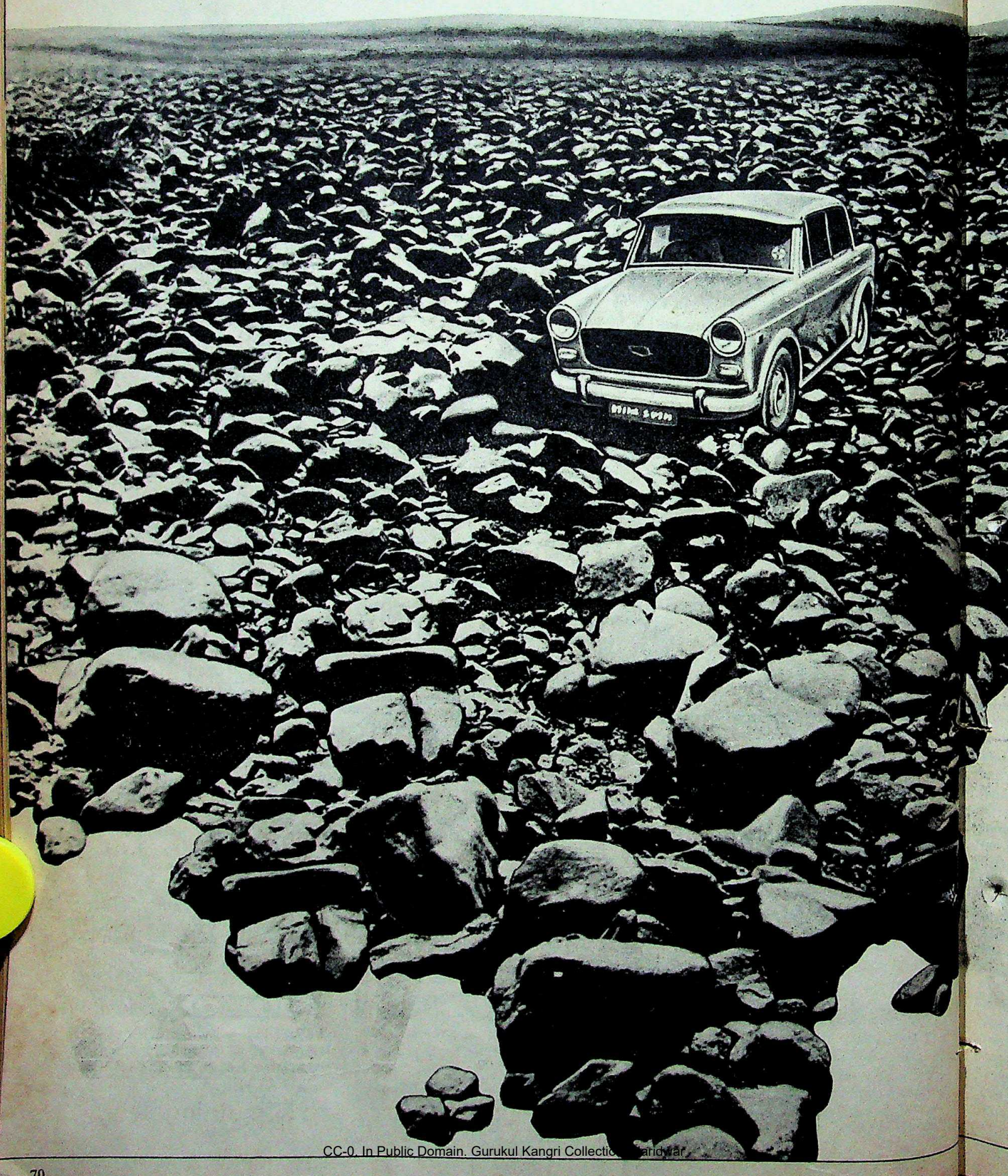
The police suspect that the provident fund racket has become endemic in all public sector concerns. There has even been talk of having a police probe to cover other companies. But whether such a probe is held or not the saddest feature of the whole episode is that so many workers were willing to go to such lengths to swindle themselves.

—K. BHANUMATHI

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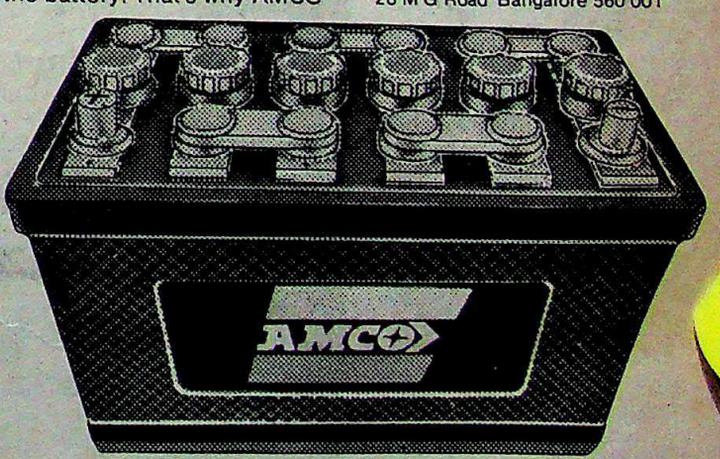
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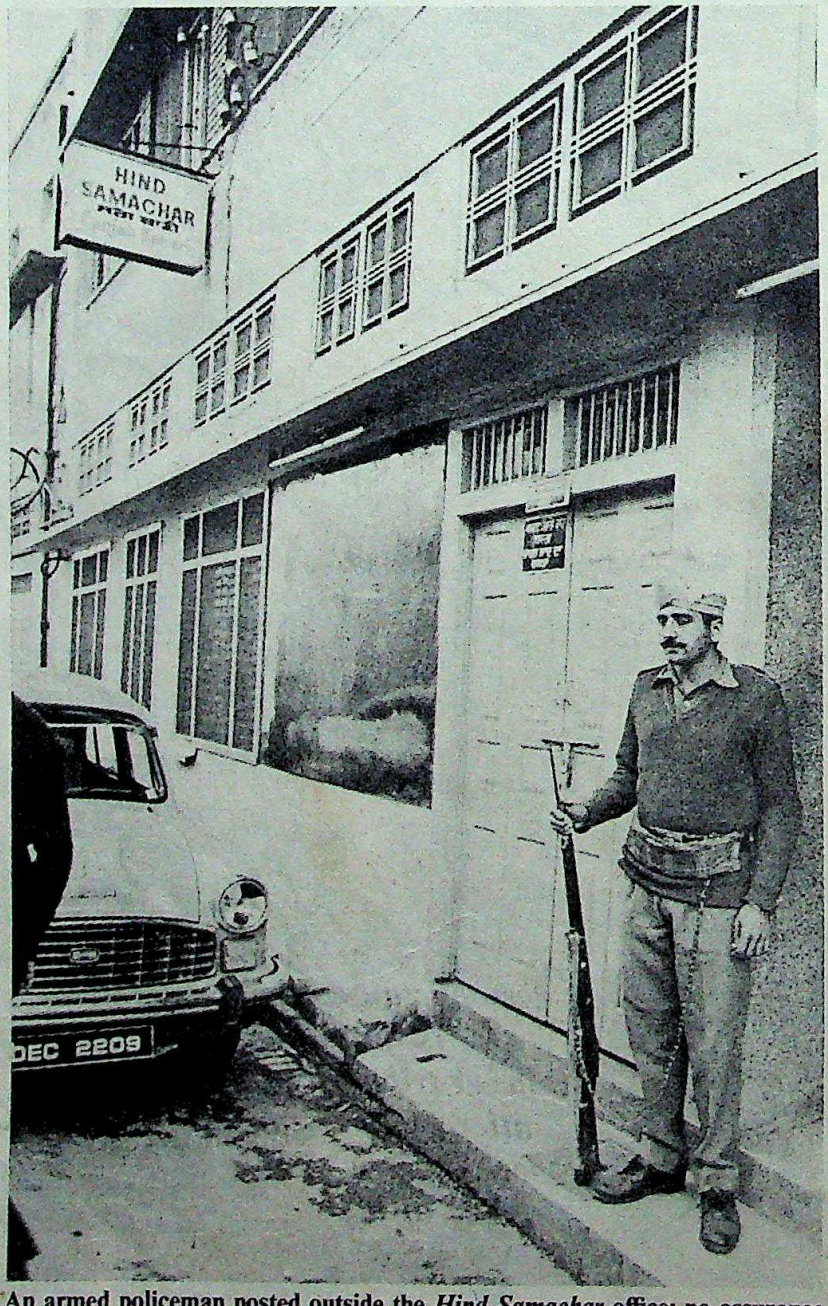
Writing Under Threat

THE PEN is supposed to be mightier than the sword, but in Punjab today, some journalists are saying it with diminishing conviction. With editors of most major dailies published from Chandigarh and Jalandhar guarded by police gunmen round the clock following threats of murder and worse from unidentified extremists, and frequent assaults on correspondents, the state has become a veritable nightmare for the Fourth Estate. Says Prem Bhatia, 72, editor-in-chief of the powerful 105-year-old Tribune group of publications: "The press has not faced anything like this before. In the past the pressures on us emanated from the Government, proprietors or commercial interests. The threat now is from the politician-extremist, a group with which we are unfamiliar."

But perhaps even more unfamiliar is the sight of the police sentry armed with the bayoneted .303 rifle outside his house and office. And the scene is more impressive at Jalandhar, the newspaper town of Punjab 160 km from Chandigarh, where well-armed sections of police guard the offices of four groups of vernacular publications—two of which are pro-Akali.

Heavily Guarded: The heat, however, is really on the editors of the anti-Akali Vir Pratap and Punjab Kesari-Hind Samachar group of publications, who go around guarded by much more than merely rifles. Virendra, the editor of the Vir Pratap group, walks out of his car into the office portico accompanied by two sten-gun-toting plainclothesmen, backed by two uniformed ones carrying the ubiquitous .303. Similarly, Ramesh Chandra, proprietor and editor of the Punjab Kesari-Hind Samachar group, whose father Lala Jagat Narain fell to extremist bullets at G.T. Road on September 9, 1981, travels with an entourage of gunmen. But even this impressive array of police weaponry is not terribly reassuring for the men on the hit lists who receive threatening letters daily, almost like fan mail.

Says Ramesh Chandra: "What is this protection worth when they could kill DIG Atwal right in front of the Golden Temple? We just believe in God and pray." So, perhaps, do the police gunmen who have, in the style so common in the North-east, begun chaining their rifles to their waist-belts to prevent the odd extremist from snatching away the weapon. Ramesh Chandra whose Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu dailies command a circulation of nearly 4.3 lakh, undoubtedly has the thickest file of threatening letters, photostat copies of which he dutifully keeps forwarding to the police. Most letters are full of filthy abuse and promise to despatch him to where "we sent your father". To add insult to injury many of these are signed "your son-in-law or brother-in-law so-and-so," with the obvious message. Says Vijay Kumar, Chandra's brother: "We are sick of the filthy ones that say nasty things about our women and threaten members of the family. But we are not scared." Adds Chandra: "It is pretty bad, let's admit. Yet, till now we have not allowed this to weaken our pen."



An armed policeman posted outside the *Hind Samachar* office: no assurance

Risky Occupation: Barely 10 minutes walk away, the same claim could be made with even greater confidence by Virendra, the 70-year-old editor of the often vitriolic Hindu mouthpieces *Vir Pratap* and *Pratap,* who has been locked in a continuous agrument with the pro-Akali Punjabi papers on various issues ranging from Bhindranwale politics to whether Lala Lajpat Rai, a Hindu martyr, actually died of police lathis while protesting against the Simon Commission, as is the popular belief, or of illness as the Punjabi papers allege. Says he: "We are used to living under constant threat now. No one knows it better than us, for two of our employees were killed in a bombing in our press. It is like the old days in the tribal-infested frontier of Pakistan; there was no rule of law. In any case every journalist has to take a risk." While Ramesh Chandra tries to project a more secular point of view, Virendra has no such pretensions. Says he, in a voice choked with emotion: "We do not feel sorry to say we are Hindus. Secularism is all nonsense and does not appeal to us—at least not as long as the communal Akalis exist."

But making light of the threats the Jalandhar editors, intrepid in their own way, have not allowed any dilution in the intensity of the little wars of words they have been waging amongst

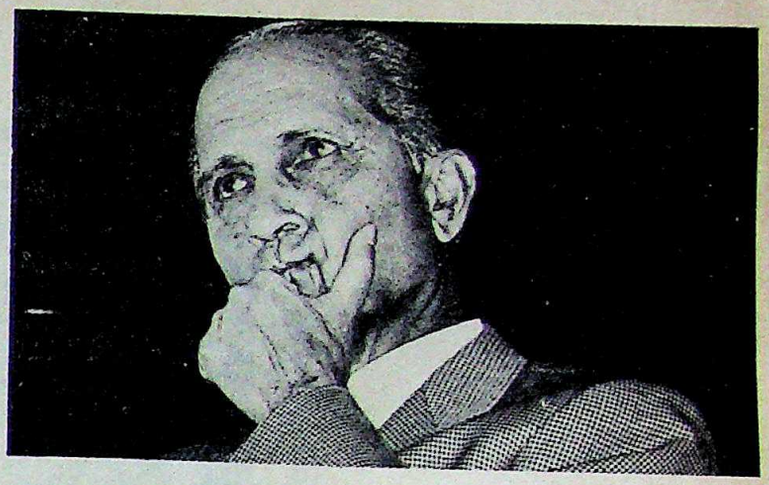
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What is this protection worth when they could kill DIG Atwal right in front of the Golden Temple? We just believe in God and pray.

—Ramesh Chandra, proprietor and editor, Punjab Kesari-Hind Samachar Group



In the past the pressure on us emanated from the Government, proprietors... The threat now is from the politician-extremist, a group with which we are unfamiliar.

—Prem Bhatia, editor, Tribune Group of publications

themselves for decades now, adding further to the atmosphere of bitterness. Very often editors of Hindi and Punjabi dailies write leaders addressing each other by name often derogatorily. It is, for example, not uncommon for the Punjabi papers to address the Hindi editors as "lalas, mahashas (pejorative term for Arya Samajists) and the stooges of the Nirankaris" while the latter return the compliment in kind, using *bedard* (without compassion) while addressing Sadhu Singh Hamdard (whose last name means 'compassionate'), the managing editor of the pro-Akali Ajeet group of publications. Says Ratnesh Singh Sodhi, the printer, publisher and acting editor of the *Akali Patrika*: "It is a vicious circle whereby if one is not attacking the other, one is retaliating. Under our new policy, we are going to stop this." Sodhi has just replaced Bharpur Singh Balbir, the acerbic pro-Bhindranwale editor detained under the NSA last month, who quit, Sodhi says, "ostensibly to make the grade in politics".

Communal Strife: While the editors fight their petty verbal wars, their correspondents on the Punjab beat are facing even more daunting hurdles. Jatinder Sharma, till recently the Amritsar correspondent of *The Tribune* was roughed up by the extremists. Says Prem Bhatia: "They went on threatening and bullying him so I said why stand on prestige? What use are you now, let us shift you. Let us see how long the new correspondent, a Sikh, lasts."

Even more than the pressure of threats, the problem the newsmen face, is being taken for granted on communal basis. Says Sanjeev Gaur, 27, the Amritsar correspondent of the *Indian Express*: "If you are a Sikh they presume you are pro-Akali. If you are a Hindu all the Hindu organisations think you will support them. It is hardly the ideal working atmosphere for a newsman." And thus it is easy to impute motives to almost everything a correspondent reports. Sums up Bhatia: "The climate of unreason is so bad that the people have lost their balance. Hate comes to one very quickly and there is a tendency to believe the worst immediately without pausing to see the other side. We are past the state of disbelief now." Bhatia says his problem is that *The Tribune* is "taken far too seriously". He adds: "This paper has certain traditions and if we don't follow them we have no right to exist."

Costly War: For the correspondents and the photographers in the field, however, there also are other, more mundane issues to bother about. Says Swadesh Talwar, the *Indian Express* photographer who has been spared by the extremists but has been roughed up at least twice by the police: "We are not at all afraid. But in this situation it should be the duty of all managements to at least insure their men on the Punjab beat."

Quite obviously, in Punjab the mediamen face difficulties they are unfamiliar with even if they have operated in disturbed areas before. In Assam and the North-east, for example, the various agitating groups have been going out of the way to be on the right side of the press and the threats are only accidental. In Punjab these are direct, and thus more real. And as the pen dourly battles on with the pistol, there is no knowing which one will come out on top and at what cost.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Jalandhar

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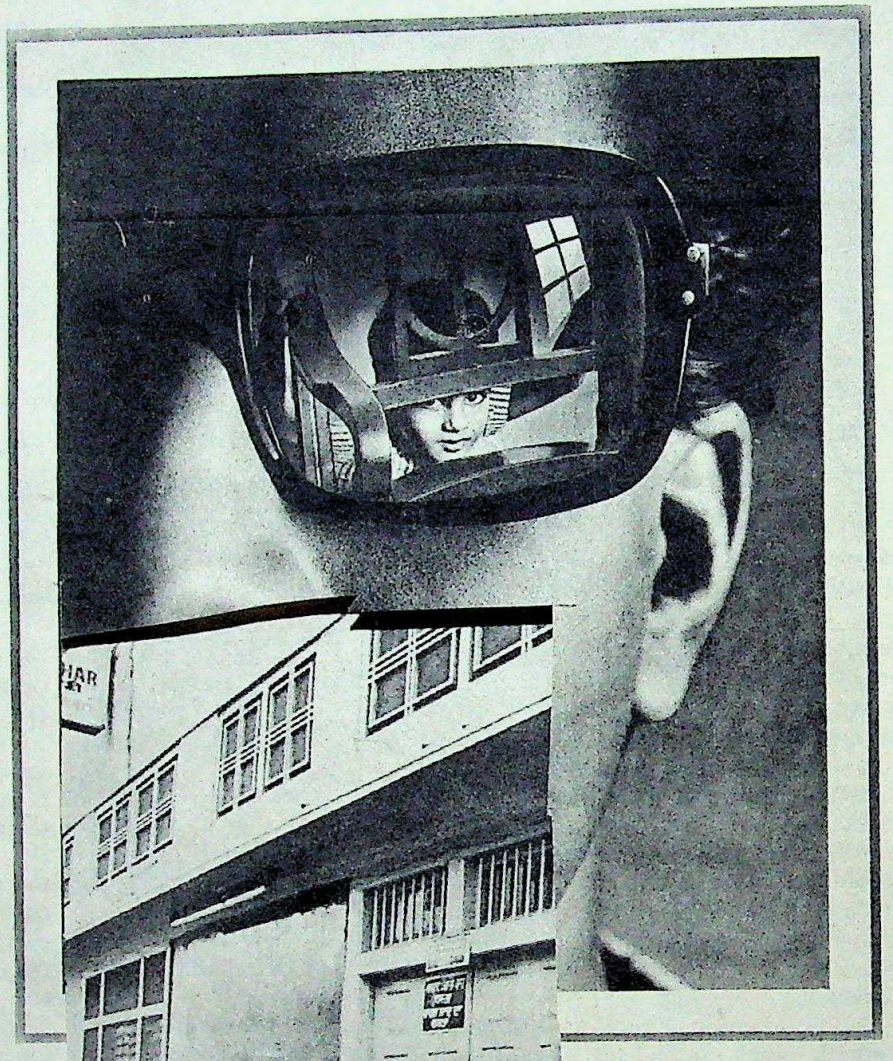
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man posted outside the *Hind Samachar* office: n

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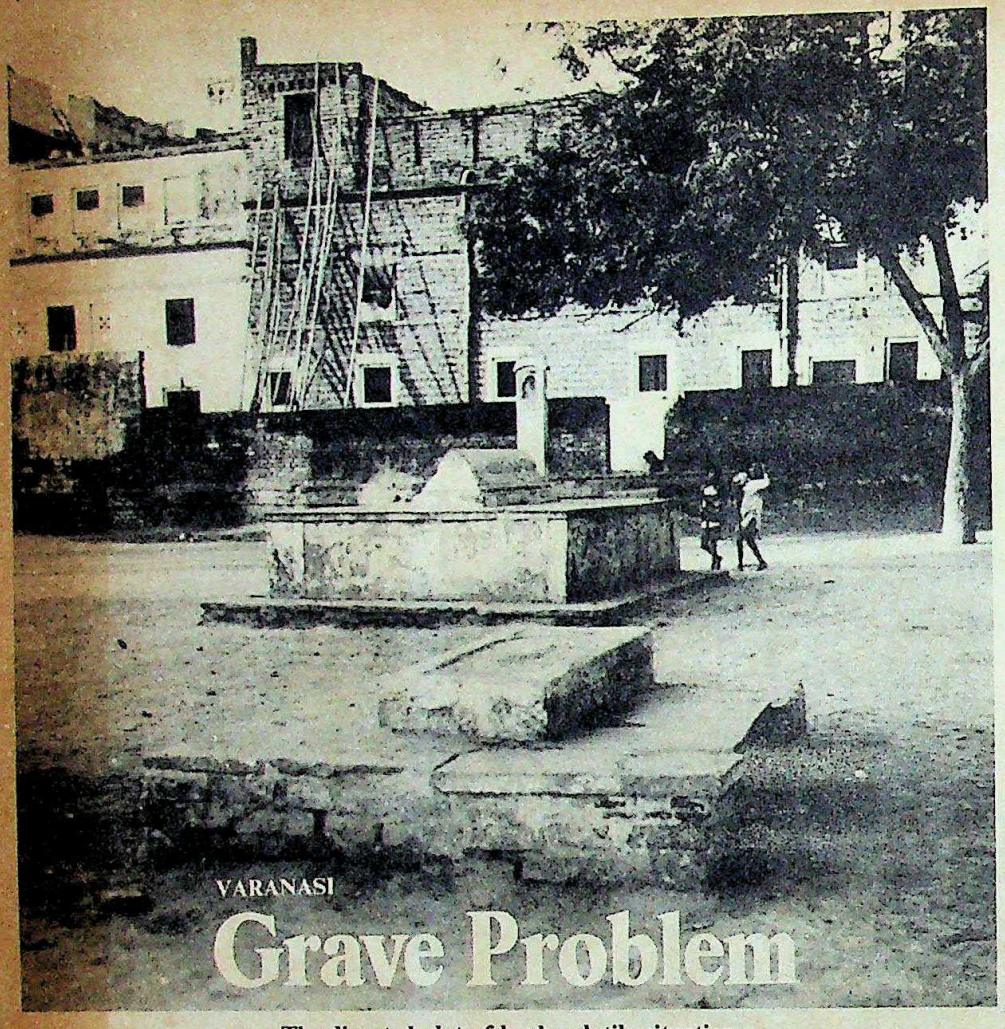
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VARANASI

Grave Problem

The disputed plot of land: volatile situation

WHEN the Supreme Court ordered the Uttar Pradesh Government to remove Sunni graves from a plot of land in Varanasi, it knew that its directive would be the source of considerable anxiety. Sure enough, after dilly dallying for six weeks the Government has not dared to shift the graves from the plot of land which is disputed by the Sunni and Shia sects. The Government, which is in dread of a communal riot, has been paralysed into inaction. Says Deputy Inspector General of Police B.S. Bedi: "It is a ticklish problem. We will honour the Supreme Court order and at the same time try to find a peaceful solution so that religious sentiments are not wounded."

If the Government is taking any steps to carry out the court's order, it was not very evident. When the court deadline expired on December 6 the graves had not been shifted. Instead, the Government is said to be making behind-the-scenes moves to reach a compromise between the two communities. Apart from mobilising extra police, the only action it had taken during the three-week spell was to transfer Varanasi's all senior officials—the commissioner, the district magistrate and the superintendent of police—out of the city. This way, the Government hoped it would be able to buy more time if it was hauled up by the court for not carrying out its orders. Says an official in Varanasi: "This may be temporary relief as the reality will have to be faced one day or the other."

Fanatical Stand: The Government has good reason for treading gently around the problem. Fanatics in the Sunni community of Varanasi have already formed an action committee and are holding regular meetings at which they swear dire oaths to oppose the Government to the last man. Says Irfanul Haq Ansari, an Urdu journalist: "If anybody tries to touch the graves we would lay down our lives or kill others." Kuer Mohammad Yasin Ansari, another Sunni activist, is even more unrestrained in his language, saying: "We would paralyse Government, commit mass suicide, gherao the Supreme Court and launch a country-wide agitation."

Such ominous threats have not gone unnoticed by the administration. The Government is well aware that any conflagration would have a disastrous fall-out. The Shias are in a hopeless minority in the city and the police would be placed in an impossibly difficult situation should violence break out. Says a senior police officer: "The Shias are in a microscopic minority and the police would naturally protect them in the event of a crisis. In that case the Sunnis might be involved with the police."

The dispute over the plot of land in Doshipura has dragged on for generations and must almost certainly be one of the longest lasting cases to have gone through the courts. The land was gifted to the two communities nearly 150 years ago by the Maharaja of Banaras and they have been fighting over it almost from the start. It bounced back and forth between courts on one point after another, till it finally reached the Supreme Court a few years ago. In October 1982 the Supreme Court ordered a seven-member committee headed by the divisional commissioner to see whether an amicable solution could be found. He suggested that a wall might be built around the two graves but this suggestion was vehemently opposed by the Sunnis.

Court Verdict: Finally after sifting through a welter of evidence and legal commentaries, the Supreme Court pronounced that it could find no rules against shifting graves. In September it issued its final orders that the graves should be moved. But even at this point the Sunnis tried to get the court to take up the case again. Their efforts earned them the wrath of the court.

But at this point the increasingly jittery state Government came up before the court with the plea that it would not be able to enforce the court's order as it would cause an enormous law and order problem. Justice V.D. Tulzapurkar was provoked to remark that if the Government could not implement the order it should resign. He added caustically: "No judicial system can work if the Government is afraid of taking action fearing the aftermath." Says Uttar Pradesh Home Secretary R.C. Takru defending his Government's stand: "The Supreme Court has every right to be angry. We just tried to place our problems before the court."

Even if tension is defused for the time being, there is no doubt that the differences between the two sects are on the rise. Of late, observers say that leaders of the two communities have been deriving their inspiration from Iran and Iraq. Some over-enthusiastic Sunnis even set up a Saddam Nagar with a Saddam Avenue, all named after Iraqi President Saddam Hussain. The Shias, for their part, take their inspiration from Ayatollah Khomeini and Iran's 'holy war'. With fanatics setting the tone on both sides and religious sentiments at stake the state Government is going to have a tough time keeping the two communities from each other's throats and easing tensions in a potentially volatile situation.

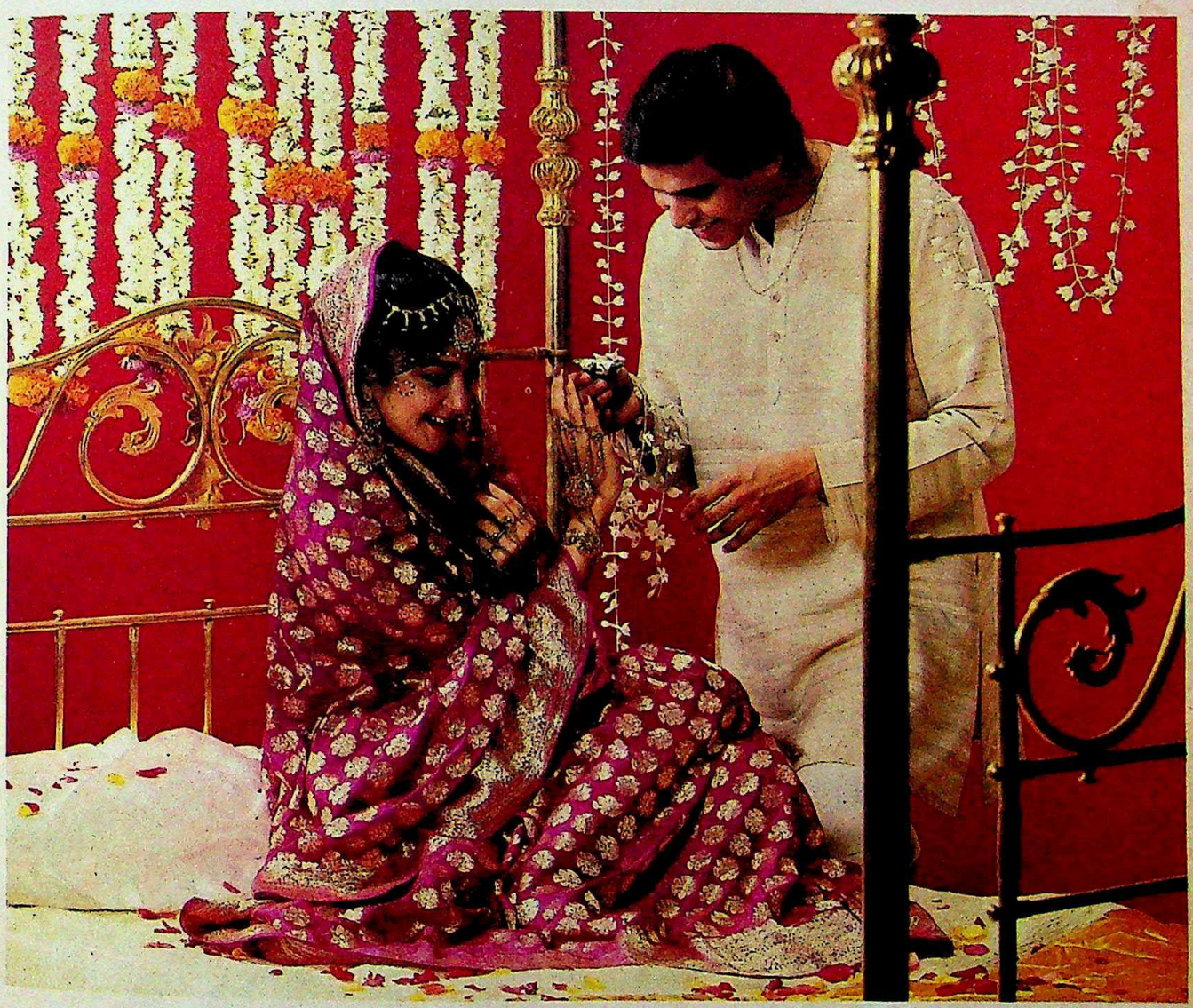
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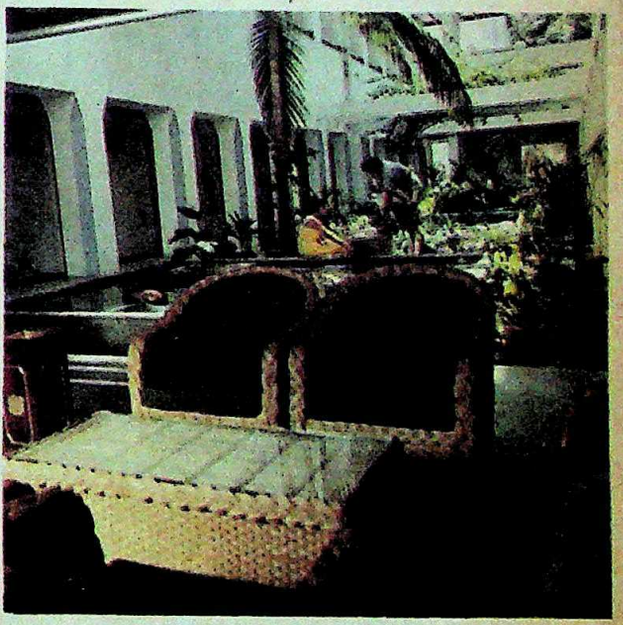
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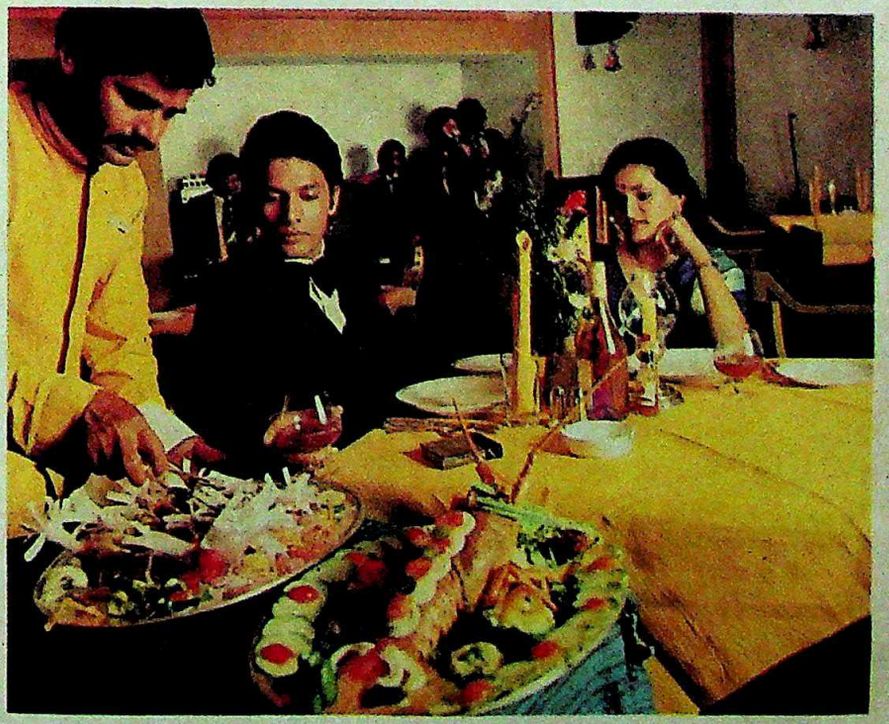
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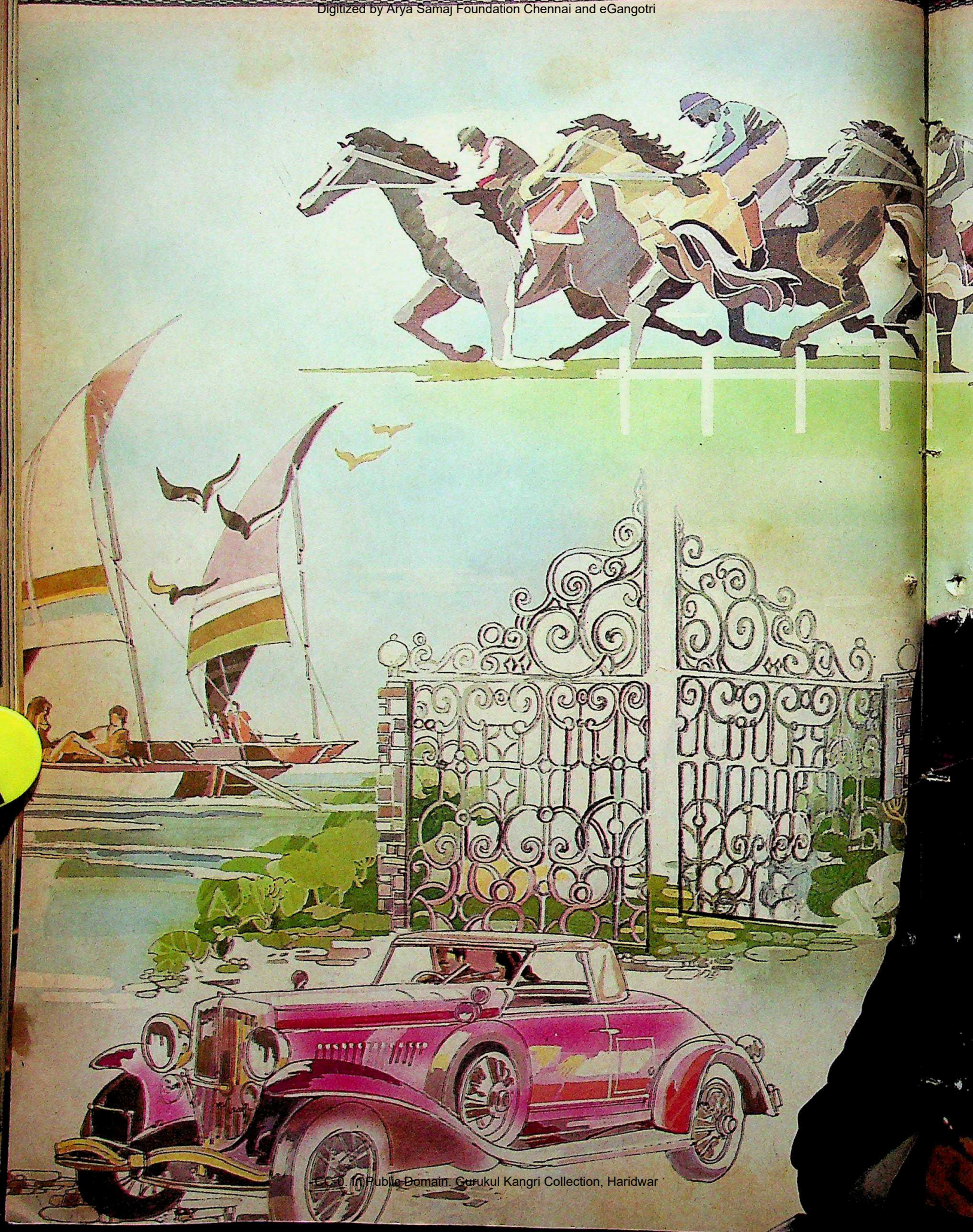
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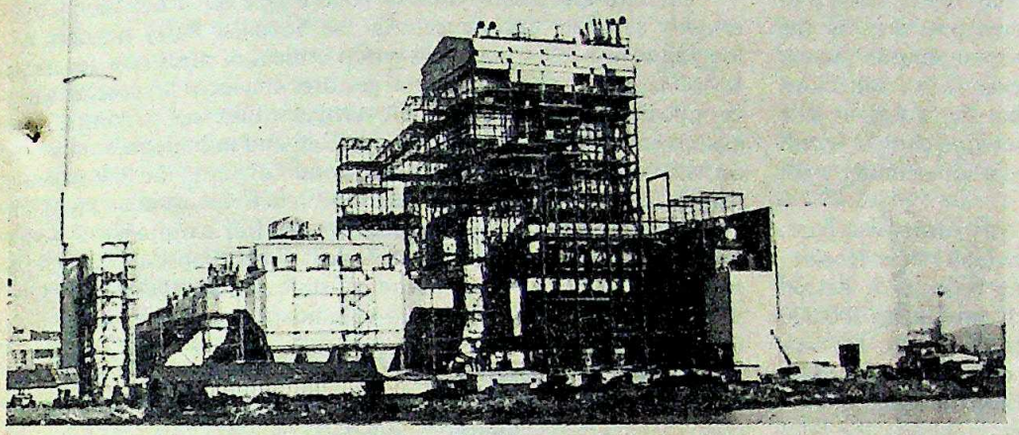
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BOMBAY

Power Struggle



Tatas' fifth Trombay unit and (right) Chinappa: emission controversy

THE MOST socially-conscious companies often turn a deaf ear when their own interests are involved. So it is with the Tatas, whose proposed new Rs 400 crore, 500 mw-thermal plant, the sixth at the site in Trombay, Bombay, has come under determined attack from environmentalists who fear that it will spell ecological disaster.

Said Saad Ali, vice-president of the Bombay Environmental Group: "This is a test case. When we protested against the installation of Tatas' fifth thermal unit of 500 mw in 1978, we were told that it was too late as the licence had already been cleared. This time, we have been vigilant for the last three years so that there can be no alibi." The Maharashtra Government cleared the sixth unit early this year and the case is now up before the Central Government for final clearance.

Last month, at a stormy meeting organised by the Department of Environment, three Bombay citizens groups accused the Tatas of feeding false data and constantly changing figures to justify their position. A major point is whether the Tatas' contention that their two new units—Unit No 5 is to be ready next year and Unit No 6 is scheduled for commission by 1990—will be using substantial quantities of gas and oil rather than coal as fuel, is justified. Presently, gas is assured only until 1985 and fertiliser plants get first preference, followed by petrochemical plants and LPG consumers. Gas for the Tatas can hence only be on a stand-by basis.

Fuelling Trouble: Earlier, in March, the petroleum secretary confirmed that supplies of gas to the power station would stop when better uses materialised. But a director says: "While we are confident of getting gas for the next 10 to 15 years, in this country no one is willing to give it to us in writing." He notes that since 1978 the plants have used about Rs 200 crore worth of gas from Bombay High which would otherwise have been flared.



But the Tatas now talk of using a combination of refinery residue, which is low in sulphur content, and coal in equal proportions. This, they say, will give an emission of 14.59 tonnes of sulphur dioxide a day for plants No 1 to No 5—perilously close to the environmentally safe limit of 15 tonnes a day. This suggests that when unit No 6 comes on stream, the sulphur dioxide emissions will cross the safety limit, but Managing Director K.M. Chinappa is categorical that even with the sixth unit "our emission levels will be well within specified limits". The Tatas are banking on an extremely efficient fuel gas desulphurisation unit, but this unit has yet to be tried out in India.

Socleen, a body of scientists fighting pollution in the city, strongly disputes these calculations, basing itself on the view that plans to use an oil-based fuel will not materialise and that units No 5 and No 6 will end up using only coal—and 4 million tonnes of it annually at that. They also dispute Tata claims that coal to be used will have a low sulphur content of 0.35 per cent, basing their own calculations on a more realistic 1 per cent sulphur content.

Using these figures, Socleen estimates that the new units will each pump more than 100 tonnes of sulphur into the air each day—far in excess of the safe limit. Asks Dr Sarnathan, general secretary of Socleen: "If they are completely convinced that their new units will not be working entirely on coal, why have they designed boilers to work entirely on coal if the need arises?"

Debatable Plans: Tata plans will also receive a set-back if a reported suggestion of the state pollution board to declare the Chembur region a sensitive area is accepted—it is only 7 km across the sea from the historic Elephanta Caves. All permitted pollution levels will be halved. Deputy Managing Director S.P. Manktala says: "We will fend for ourselves if such a situation arises."

The waste disposal plan has also come under fire. The idea is to deposit it as slurry through pipes in low-lying land, which will then be reclaimed as green areas and playing fields. The Tatas estimate the use of some 600 hectares for over 18 million tonnes of ash in the next 20 years. They emphasise that no waste will be dumped into the sea as a dyke has been built between the dumping sites and the sea.

But Kissan Mehta, president of the Save Bombay Committee, says that 600 hectares would amount to 10 per cent of the total area of the island city—he fears that the Tatas will dump the ash on the seabed and later try to reclaim land illegally.

Confident Management: Tata executives, however, are confident that all these problems can be solved. Notes Chinappa: "Historically, Tatas have all been very conscious of obligations to the community. In this case it is a question of priorities." He says that with access to improved methods of pollution control, there is no great danger from pollutants. In fact, several Tata projects pay particular attention to environmental issues, planting trees, and setting up parks. Jamshedpur is a model city in this regard. Adds Manktala: "The whole hypothesis on which the environmentalists have based their analysis is incorrect. They do not accept our fuel position and contest that the unit is a replacement."

The basic question is: at what stage will the Tatas move out of Trombay? Units No 5 and No 6 will together produce 1,000 mw, and the latter is meant to replace units No 1 to No 4, which generate 360 mw. But there is no guarantee that the first units will be scrapped soon and Unit No 4 is expected to continue until 1995 at least. And the new units will provide less than 40 per cent of Bombay's energy requirement at the end of the century, projected at 2,530 mw. If the clearance for the plant comes through, the problems could have only just begun.

—COOMI KAPOOR

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ARMS SALES

Laissez Fire



AS MILITARY specialists and defence commentators tried to unravel the James Bond-style mystery behind the sale of five French Super Etendards armed with AM-39 air-to-surface Exocet missiles to Iraq last month, the arguments provided by the otherwise inscrutable spokesmen at various French ministries were a masterly exercise in fallacious reasoning. French logic sought to indicate that the warplane sale would balance the leverage in the three-year Iran-Iraq conflict which had already claimed more than 250,000 lives and was beginning to tilt in favour of Iran.

Diplomats here sought to explain that Iraq's treasury was bare; it was palpably dependent for funds on wealthier Gulf states. Its principal economic resource—oil—was dwindling because of barred routes or shattered pipelines and was currently producing 700,000 barrels a day, compared with five times as much before the war began. Meanwhile, Iran continued to export 2 million barrels a day.

The five Super Etendards would give Iraq both the range and the capability to threaten Iranian oil installations, including the vital Kharg oil terminal, and so force Iran to the negotiating table. The threat might also make Iran persuade its volatile friend, Syria, to reopen Iraq's Mediterranean oil pipelines in exchange for an Iraqi pledge not to use the planes against Iranian oil traffic.

Unconvincing Explanations: At first glance, it is hard to fault the French reasoning in providing Iraq with new military credibility. However, the French sale of the Super Etendards was effected against the advice and wishes of its closest allies—the United States, Britain and West Germany. Threats by Iran to mine the Strait of Hormuz should the French deal go ahead was seen as a pointless risk by NATO members.

But behind the sophistry lies the fact that Iraq owes France nearly $6 billion for various arms deliveries made during the last three years. If it lost the war, the French would be saddled with an unaffordable bad debt at a time when the French economy is wheezing in a squall and arms sales overseas have visibly slackened. The airplane deal also highlighted the extent to which the French weapons industry is dependent on exports. Moreover, the controversy came at a time when more than 4,000 French troops were in Chad and Lebanon and France had never been more involved militarily on the international scene since the colonial era.

Political Stance: It does not seem long ago that the Socialists—while in opposition—had condemned the role of France as prime providers of military hardware. Lionel Jospin, the articulate Socialist Party secretary with a stylish turn of phrase, had solemnly proclaimed: "It was not right for France to play the role of fire-raiser in the world." 'Less Arms, More Machine Tools' was a slogan for the Socialists when they spoke of cooperation with the Third World. In one of his first symbolic acts on becoming President, Francois Mitterrand ordered bombs and rockets to be removed from Mirage jets before he inspected them at the celebrated Le Bourget air show. Soon after the Socialist Government took over, Charles Hernu, the defence minister, and Claude Cheysson, the foreign minister, enunciated that France would not sell arms to 'racist' and 'fascist' states nor to 'dictatorships' that could use French arms for repression.

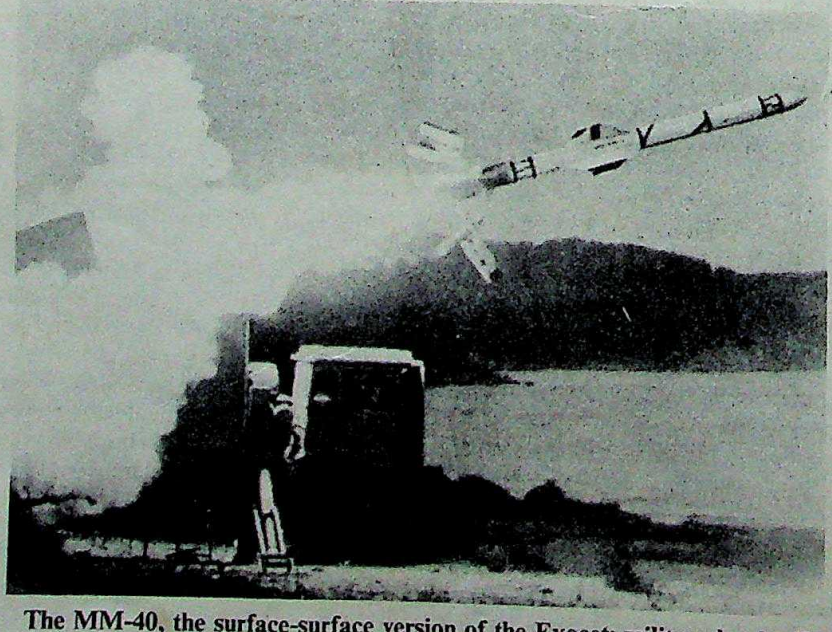
But two-and-a-half years of governing France has been a thoroughly sobering experience. As one Socialist Party member belonging to the left wing CERES group critical of arms sales overseas says, it is easy to make emotional gestures and incisive speeches when in opposition. For a Socialist Government that was striking a blow against interventionism, neo-colonialism and militarism, it now has on its record: French troops in Chad and Lebanon; the first Atlantic alliance meeting in Paris in 17 years; a French signature on the Williamsburg declaration on global security and full acceptance of NATO's projected missile deployment; arms deals with almost anyone who is solvent; support for African heads of state not exactly renowned for their ardour for civil liberties and human rights; and business as usual with South Africa.

Economic Pressures: The Socialist Government fully understands the pivotal role played by the French weapons manufacturers in the country's military-industrial complex. Last year it had 10 per cent of the world's arms export market—next only to the Soviet Union with 37 per cent and the United States with 34 per cent. There are over 280,000 persons employed in the French armaments industry—out of whom nearly 1,000,000 work exclusively on exports, since more than one-third of production is sold abroad.

With its laissez-faire arms policy, sales abroad increased from 6.3 billion francs in 1970 to a total of 25.2 billion francs in 1979 with the largest increase coming in 1973-74 after the Yom Kippur war and the oil embargo. By 1979, foreign military sales accounted for approximately 4.9 per cent of total French exports, compared with 2.5 per cent in 1970. Indeed the export of arms grew twice as rapidly as France's total exports.

The following statistics give a striking idea of the existing dependence on exports. For the years 1974–78, of the 338 Mirage fighter planes that were ordered, 297 were for exports—and more than half of the aeronautic industry's production consisted of Mirages. The story is the same in other sectors. Of the 318 helicopters ordered from Aerospatiale only 46 were for the French armed forces. Matra exports 75 per cent of its military output. The same is the case with both the anti-tank missiles of Aerospatiale and the AMX-30 tank.

Since the beginning of the '70s, there has been a change in the direction of the flow of arms. Previously two-thirds of deliveries were to other industrial countries, primarily members of the EEC with occasional sales to the United States. During the '70s, most deliveries went to the Third World and by 1977 the developing countries accounted for 85 per cent of arms purchases. The Middle East has accounted for more than half of French arms exports in recent years



The MM-40, the surface-surface version of the Exocet: military hard-sell

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and there is a significant correlation between French oil imports and its arms sales.

To a foreign observer it often seems curious that there is hardly any public opinion within France that might possibly thwart a controversial arms deal. In a country where pride in the armed forces is synonymous with a prickly patriotism, outrage is indeed in short supply. Unlike in the United States, where a senator might conduct research with a competent back-up team, rarely does an opposition legislator question the price-tag on a new missile or jet fighter.

It was in 1976, that the Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Francois Marty—perhaps the most powerful ecclesiastical authority in France—preached an eloquent sermon from the pulpit of Notre Dame denouncing the mounting "commerce of death" which he said was becoming an institution supported by collective hypocrisy. The sharpest attacks—always sporadic—have often come from religious groups and sometimes labour unions have questioned sales to Chile or to South Africa. But the Left has been loath to assume the role of critic of military spending because it was identified for too long with Utopian pacifism.

Public Acceptance: Said Dominique Moisi, associate director of the influential French Institute of International Relations: "Europe or NATO is considered a privileged American market. So European countries like France look elsewhere in the Third World. I agree it is not a very happy situation—neither from a moral nor a political perspective. But these are hard realities you have to face. However, as France's experience in Africa has shown, selling weapons is just one element of gaining influence alongside cultural, bureaucratic or economic ties. Arms alone cannot create influence; but in some cases, you don't have influence without arms."

AS ANDREW J. Pierre points out in his *Global Politics of Arms Sales*: "France must have the capability of equipping its own armed forces without depending upon an uncertain source of supply from abroad. In order to maintain this ability to arm itself, France must export weapons abroad as the demand at home is insufficient to justify the arms industry in economic terms. Arms exports, therefore make economically possible a basic political necessity of the country."

Much of the French establishment is proud of the technological sophistication of the armaments industry. The French have had an especially proud tradition of inventiveness in aviation, commemorated in the vocabulary of the industry by such words as fuselage, aileron and aeroplane itself. The Wright Brothers had begun their experiments in France and the flight of Louis Blériot across the English Channel in 1909 was a landmark in aviation. After the humiliations of the Second World War and the Nazi occupation, successive French governments were determined to catch up with the industry in Britain and America as an assertion of national independence.

Strategic Decisions: This quiescent and nonchalant attitude has suited past French presidents and it has suited Francois Mitterrand too. The one time the debate came alive was when the Socialist Government announced that it would enhance its independent nuclear deterrent force, with the option to manufacture a neutron bomb, while cutting back on conventional forces. France's formidable *force de frappe* includes: six nuclear submarines, 36 deep penetration bombers, 18 land-based missile systems situated amid the brooding grandeur of the Plateau d'Albion in the Alpes de Haute Provence. The Government's decision not to pinch centimes for its *force de frappe* while cutting down conventional forces provoked the air force chief, General Bernard Capillon, the army's General Jean Delaunay and the navy's Admiral Yves Lennhardt to protest against the decision and outline long-term dangers.

However, the stunning Government decision did not mean France's conventional forces had lost teeth. As Dr Gregory Flynn, deputy director at the prestigious Atlantic Institute for International Affairs, pointed out: "The French are indeed emphasising the nuclear aspect, although the reasons today are quite different from those outlined by General de Gaulle. He was primarily concerned with France's security. Today the French concern relates to overall nuclear balance in Europe and what that means to its allies, especially the Germans. However, the interesting thing is, while this talk about trimming conventional forces is going on, the French still have the capacity to project into Germany in case of battle. Their *Force d'Action Rapide* is definitely conceived in European terms. It is clear that this Government does not reject the Giscardian notion that France's security begins beyond its borders or on the Elbe river."

The lions in the French armaments industry—almost all of them state-owned—include: Aerospatiale, the giant helicopter and missile manufacturer; Dassault, the Mirage maker; Thomson-CSF which makes sophisticated electronic equipment; Matra, the guided missile maker and GIAT, the tank producer.

Sordid Side: Scandals within the French arms industry are not unknown. One of the most well-known involved the Dassault company in July 1976 when the personal accountant of Marcel Dassault—one of France's most powerful men—disappeared with $1.6 million from a company account. The accountant, Henri de Vathaire, was soon traced and linked to the celebrated French adventurer, Jean Kay, who tried to hijack a Pakistan Airlines plane to raise money for Bangladesh. De Vathaire apparently had a dossier on the operations of the Dassault company and there were attempts to hush the affair, which failed when the story was leaked in two stages in the evening *France-Soir* and the newsmagazine *Le Point*. Despite the damaging publicity, the company emerged coolly from the controversy, unscathed.

France's large-scale promotional efforts for arms sales have frequently raised concern and allegations about deals of questionable ethics, involving state funds made available for *pots de vin* or bribes. Valery Giscard d' Estaing as President became sufficiently concerned with it to commission Pierre Mayer, a widely respected inspector of finance, to undertake a top secret investigation in 1976 of the state's role as a manufacturer and exporter of arms.

The central findings of the Mayer report were disputed by the Ministry of Defence which tried to smother it by commissioning a rival report from the inspector general of the army. However, the Mayer report was leaked to the press and was revealing. The report concluded that the state was unwisely assuming responsibility for covering up transfers of money (that is, bribes) that would be subject to severe criticism should they become public knowledge. But as some defence analysts have pointed out, there is no evidence to suggest that the recommendations of the Mayer report have been followed up.

The present outlook for the armament industry is not bright. The first half of this year has brought bad news and left the industry shell-shocked. Weapons orders were 27 per cent lower than in the first half of 1982. There has been a sharp fall in purchases by old customers, especially Francophone Africa and the oil states of the Gulf. An increase in sales to Central and South America, representing a quarter of all sales in the first half of this year, did not compensate. Experts say the market for small arms is saturated and the debt-servicing problems of many Third World countries are a significant factor in the slump in demand.

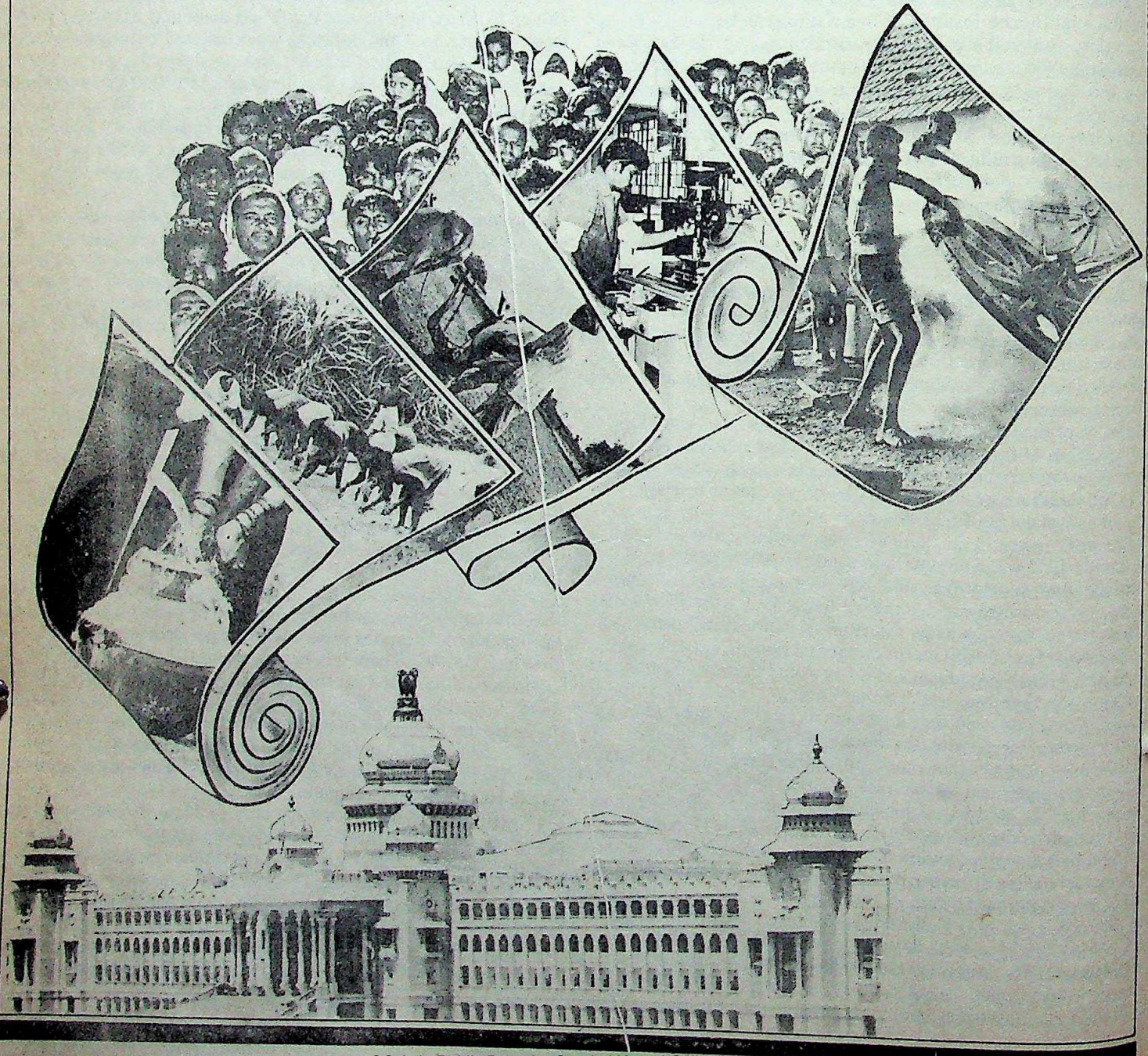
And falling sales are not the only problem. French arms firms find it increasingly difficult to get large advance payments that can be put out to earn interest. Hard times and tougher competition have removed that cushion and many weapons manufacturers are having to use their own resources or loans to pay for development work. France's arms salesmen might well be reflecting the sentiments of the Remington agent who is said to have ruefully commented: "We certainly are in a hell of a business when a fellow has to wish for trouble to make a living."

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* A pragmatic plan to strike against the spectre of unemployment. Employment guaranteed to everyone between 18 and 60 years of age with minimum wages paid in cash or grains within 15 days of registration. Starting this month in 40 taluks and adding 35 taluks every six months, the scheme will cover the whole state in 2 years.

* Testimony to the transformation in rural life. ANTYODAYA—Five poor families in each village chosen and aided to raise them above the poverty line. Already, 1.5 lakh families benefitted—over a Crore of rupees spent.

* Decentralisation, basic to Democracy, is soon to be a reality in the State. Throwing open a great opportunity for people's participation in self government and developmental activities. The Zilla Parishad and Mandal Panchayat Bill on the anvil.

* Galvanised into action by the severe lack of drinking water, the Government has already dug 16,000 bore wells—a record unsurpassed. So far Rs. 20 Crores have been spent on this priority task and over 10,000 villages provided with drinking water.

* The disastrous consequencies of deforestation if not checked now, will set an irreversible trend in ecological imbalance. Apart from a massive forest development project to be carried out in 54,000 hectares at a cost of nearly Rs.. 10 Crores, a novel plan to utilise youth power in forestry is being implemented. 20 Acres of land is being given to schools and collages each, along with seedlings, implements and technical advice. The income from this to be used for development of the educational institutions.

* A novel scheme for direct recruitment of talented Harijan and Girijan youth to the higher levels of Government service is being implemented for those scoring highest number of marks in University examinations.

* Widows with an income of less than Rs. 1,500 per year are now being given pension of Rs. 50 a month upto the age of 60; after which they will be entitled to old age pension.

* Unprecedented concessions to students of all age groups to make use of Government transport facilities. Children below 12 years will have free transport to school and back home. High School and Colleges students given concessional rates. The first 5 ranking students of SSLC and Pre-university as well as high scoring Harijan-Girijan students will be provided free transport for a year.

* A comprehensive Bill for reforming the system of education. Exemption from payment of capitation fee for Karnataka students in Medical colleges over a period of five years. Cancellation of capitation fee in polytechnics and B.Ed. colleges. Seat reservation in Medical and Engineering colleges for Kannadigas living in other states.

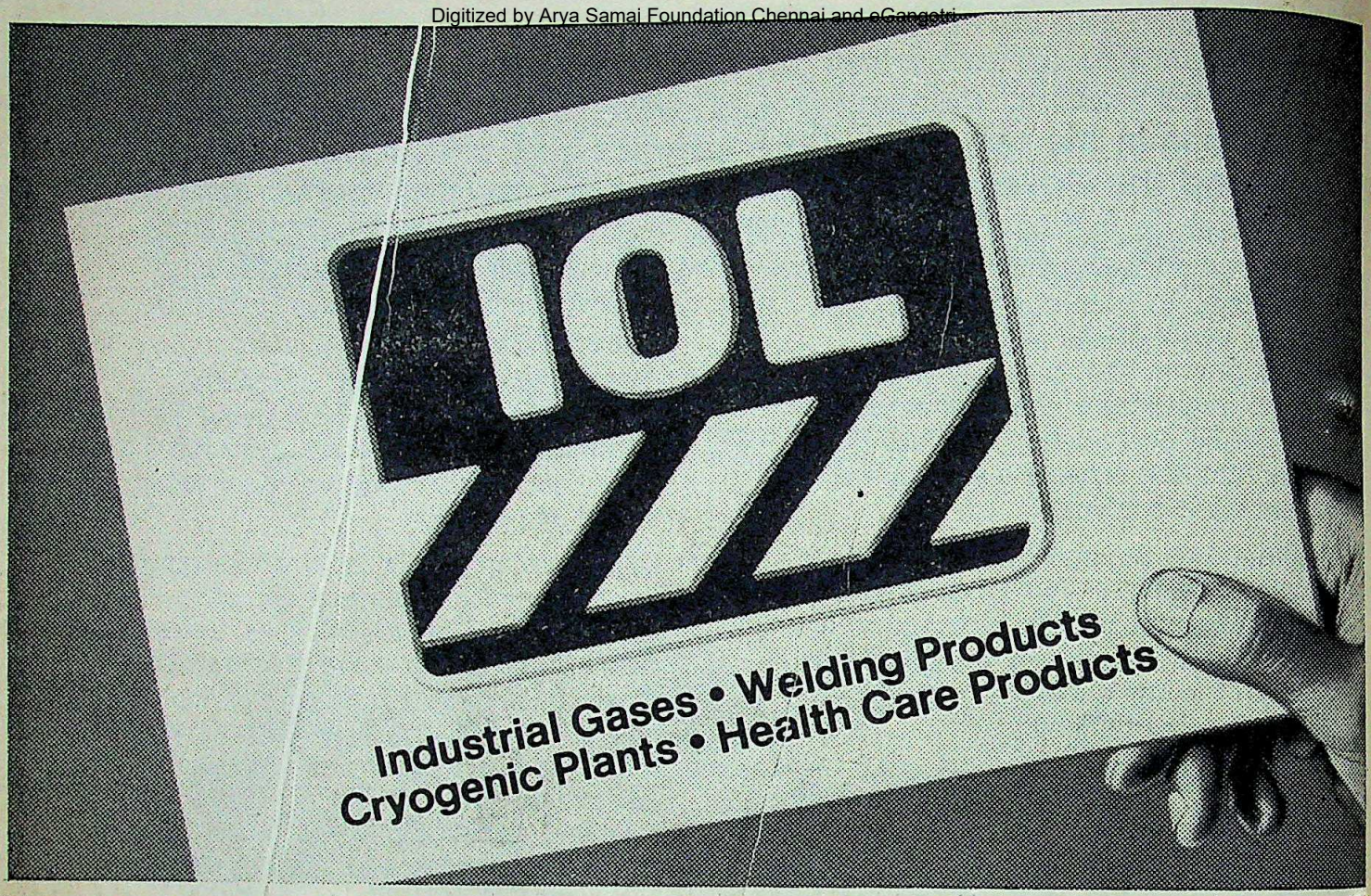
* A policy which has imparted a new dynamism towards industrialisation in the State—particularly of employment oriented small industries, has resulted in starting of 1000 new industries every month. 20,000 Khadi and Village industries will be set up to assist 5 lakh artisans.

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UNITED KINGDOM

The Indian Trend

IN BRITAIN, 1983 was definitely the year of India. A year that saw the full flowering of all the hopes and ambitions sowed by the Festival of India the previous summer. The result was a profusion of interest in India, in its food and films, in its people and traditions, music and folklore. Not since the 200-year link was snapped has India and Indianness made such an impact on Britain.

Commented television producer Samir Shah: "Today, India is in fashion." And this fashion has caught on in fields so diverse that now it is hard to identify its exact roots and explain its emergence. In part, no doubt, it owes itself to the publicity and popularity of the Festival of India. But, more important, because it has spread beyond the wildest expectations of the festival, it must necessarily arise out of the growing nostalgia for India from a generation now in old age reliving its youth and, contradictorily, out of the curiosity and discovery of their heirs who are flocking to India afresh.

The most amazing result of this has been the impact of India in the arena of avant-garde fashion. The new, evocative, brilliant colours and styles of traditional India first crept through in Zandra Rhodes's zany Bond Street fashions. And although her two selections may not have revolutionised *haute couture*, they nevertheless made their mark at the designer end of the fashion industry. As design college lecturer Ayesha Khan put it: "Zandra's choice made people sit up and take notice and suddenly Indian fabrics and designs were being talked about."



Chic Catch: With its foot firmly planted in Rhodes's front door, Indianness began to sweep through the trendy salons of London's West End. Vidal Sassoon established his own Indian-inspired hair look, then Liberty's, the upmarket establishment-oriented department store, filled its basements with Indian art and handicraft, thus translating the new wave of interest in the subcontinent into material possessions for London's rich. The pinnacle was reached when the pop group Fun Boy Three released their latest single with an Urdu translation of the song on the flip side. The record hit the charts and Urdu pop was born.

If anything was missing, it was Indian influence on the imagination and creativity of a major cult artist. And now even that has happened. Last month an exhibition of sculptor Andrew Logan's most recent works opened in London under the title 'The Goddesses'. They are his interpretations of the women of India. They look like a grown-up, real-life Christmas pantomime—provocative, amusing, startling, funny and sensational. As Logan explained: "I've always loved rituals and glitter, and going to India was like going home."





Zandra Rhodes (top) and her Indian designs being modelled in London: initial breakthrough

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Logan's Mumtaz lies dead, unromantic and even unpretty, but inside her neck lights up the Taj Mahal and beneath her body flows a river of mirrored light. He calls her his *Goddess of the Living Taj*. His *Goddess of the Void* is blue, in leopard leotards, with lotus lamps held in her hands, illuminating her face. His *Tree of Life*, an imitation peepul, sings and live birds inhabit its branches. "The whole thing is totally outrageous," says former *Guardian* journalist Shyama Perera, "but it's also wonderful, lovely, full of good fun, and strangely beautiful."

Curry Flurry: If its emergence into trend-setting fashion gave Indianness a certain flashy topicality, what has given it a solid basis in day to day living is a new and profound interest in Indian food. The curry has for long been Britain's staple post-pub-crawl diet. It was cheap, filling and easily available. But it was also downmarket food. In 1983, that image has dramatically changed. The curry has become a cuisine and the local Bangladeshi-owned dive has been supplemented by chic *haut monde* restaurants. At one such, the Taj Hotel group-owned Bombay Brasserie, Indian food has achieved its apotheosis amidst the Deen Dayal photographs, the carved wood and brass chests, the old punkahs and the clinking cocktails. It's now fashionable, respectable and, most important, it's expensive.

The result of this has not just been an escalating fondness for good authentic Indian food, but the emergence of a connoisseur class of cooks who want to know how to make it. In response, the BBC has twice this year shown a television series on Indian cooking by actress Madhur Jaffrey. Her book based on the series stayed at the top of the best-seller list for months. Little wonder then that a Curry Club has emerged. Today, it supplies its members with authentic spices, organises gourmet tours of India and arranges speciality-tasting evenings where the new cognoscenti tuck into bhelpuri and aloo papri, replenish their stock of pudina ki chatni and swap recipes.

As Curry Club Chairman Pat Chapman explains: "The English now realise that it's time that they learnt what the real cuisines of India are like—not just tandoori chicken and bhuna gosht. And the response we receive is astonishing. We honestly cannot meet all of it."

Lasting Affair: If this was as far as the interest of the English in India and in Indianness had gone, it would still have been remarkable. But in fact during the year it went considerably further. With a major boost from television, Indianness was catapulted from its flirtation with fashion, beyond its romance with exotic eating, to a lasting affair in the drawing-rooms of millions.

With the birth of Channel Four in November 1982 the Indian feature film has become an established form of Sunday afternoon entertainment. Earlier this year Britons sat back after their roast beef and Yorkshire pudding to watch 'golden oldies' like *Mother India* and *Guide*. At the moment they are experiencing the more demanding attractions of Benegal's *Bhumika*, Saeed Mirza's *Arvind Desai ki Ajeeb Dastaan*, and Mani Kaul's *Duvidha*. The result is knowledge of, and slowly but surely, even some appreciation of Indian films, from Bombay's popular hits to the more critically valued art films. "I love the Indian films I see," remarked London taxi-driver John Wilton, "they are full of fun and fat women, and the heroes are always good guys and virtuous. It's still about a type of world we've forgotten. I like them because they are so amazing."

The consequent impact of India on television is enormous. *Gandhi*, *Octopussy* and *Heat and Dust*—and in time, no doubt, *A Passage to India*, *Kim*—have made India a reality on the box-office screen. But it's television that transported it through the front door and into the family living-room. This is why 1983 has been the year of India.

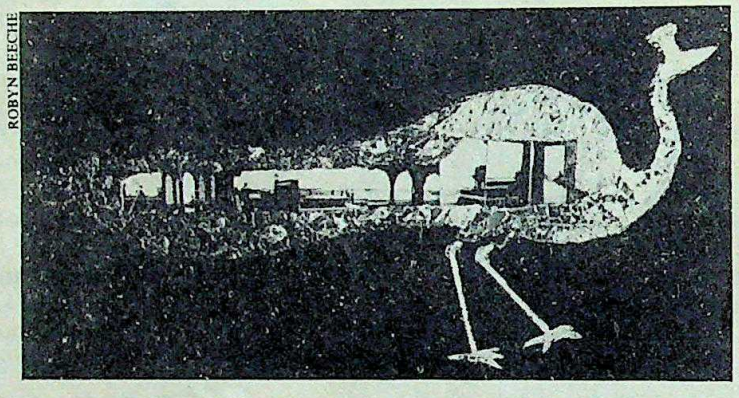
Wide Influence: When Channel Four started, its aim was to cater to audiences hitherto ignored by television networks. It identified Britain's Asian community of 1.5 million as one of its six main targets. The result was a fortnightly magazine programme, Eastern Eye, and two series of Indian feature films—with a third to be screened in April.

But the influence has been far wider. Under pressure, the BBC followed with 14 half-hour films on India, *Wheels of Fire*. The theatre invited Habib Tanvir to stage his *Bahadur Kalyanin* and *Charandas Chor*. The publishing industry produced R.K. Narayan's *Malgudi Tiger*, Ved Mehta's *Vedi* and *Family Affair* and finally *Times* reporter Trevor Fishlock and Nick Garland's accounts of India. Further, two major Indian television series, *The Jewel in the Crown* and *The Far Pavilions*, are scheduled for release in the future.

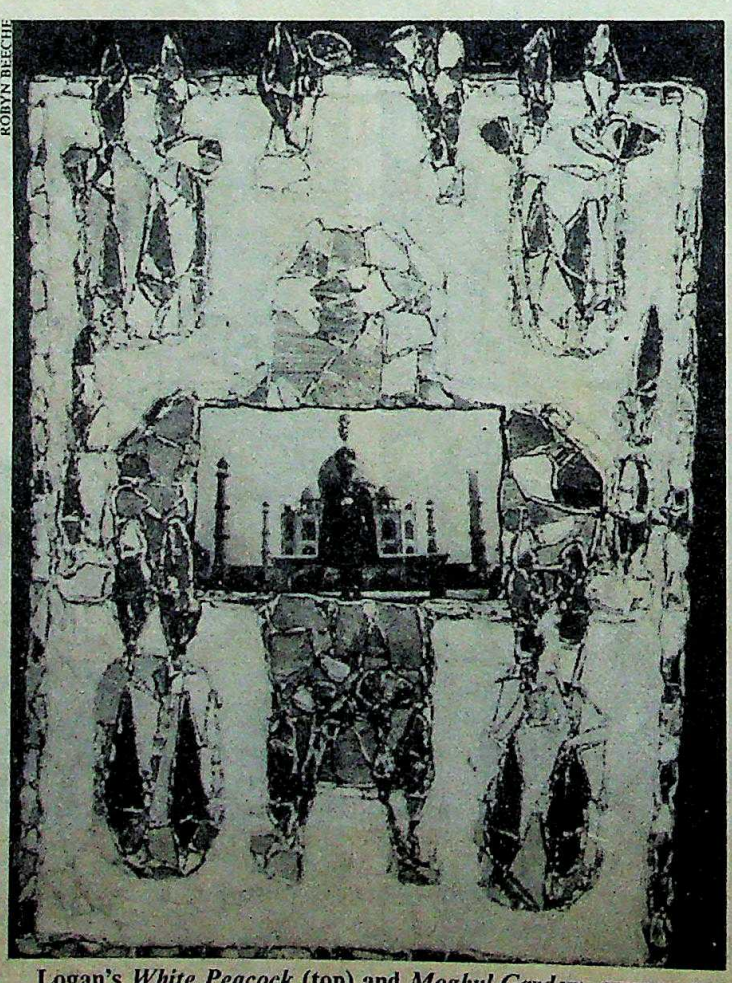
The result: modern India has arrived in Britain. There is still a lot the British have to learn and many misconceptions and prejudices they need to shed. But, from 1983 onwards they are getting to know India, understand India and learning to like it. And by the look of it 1983 may not be the only year of India in Britain.

—KARAN THAPAR in London

ROBYN BEECHE



ROBYN BEECHE



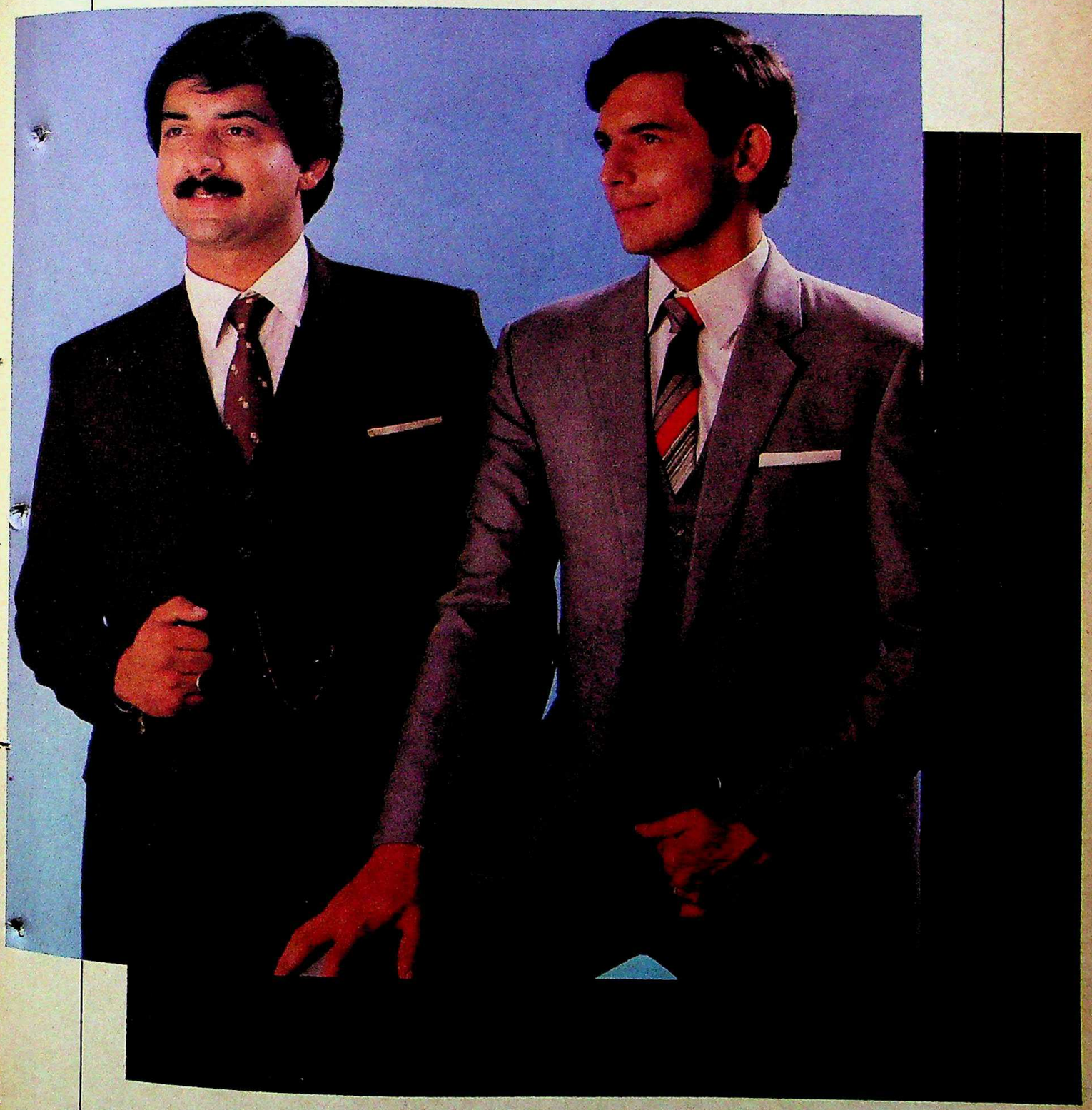
Logan's *White Peacock* (top) and *Moghul Garden*: awareness

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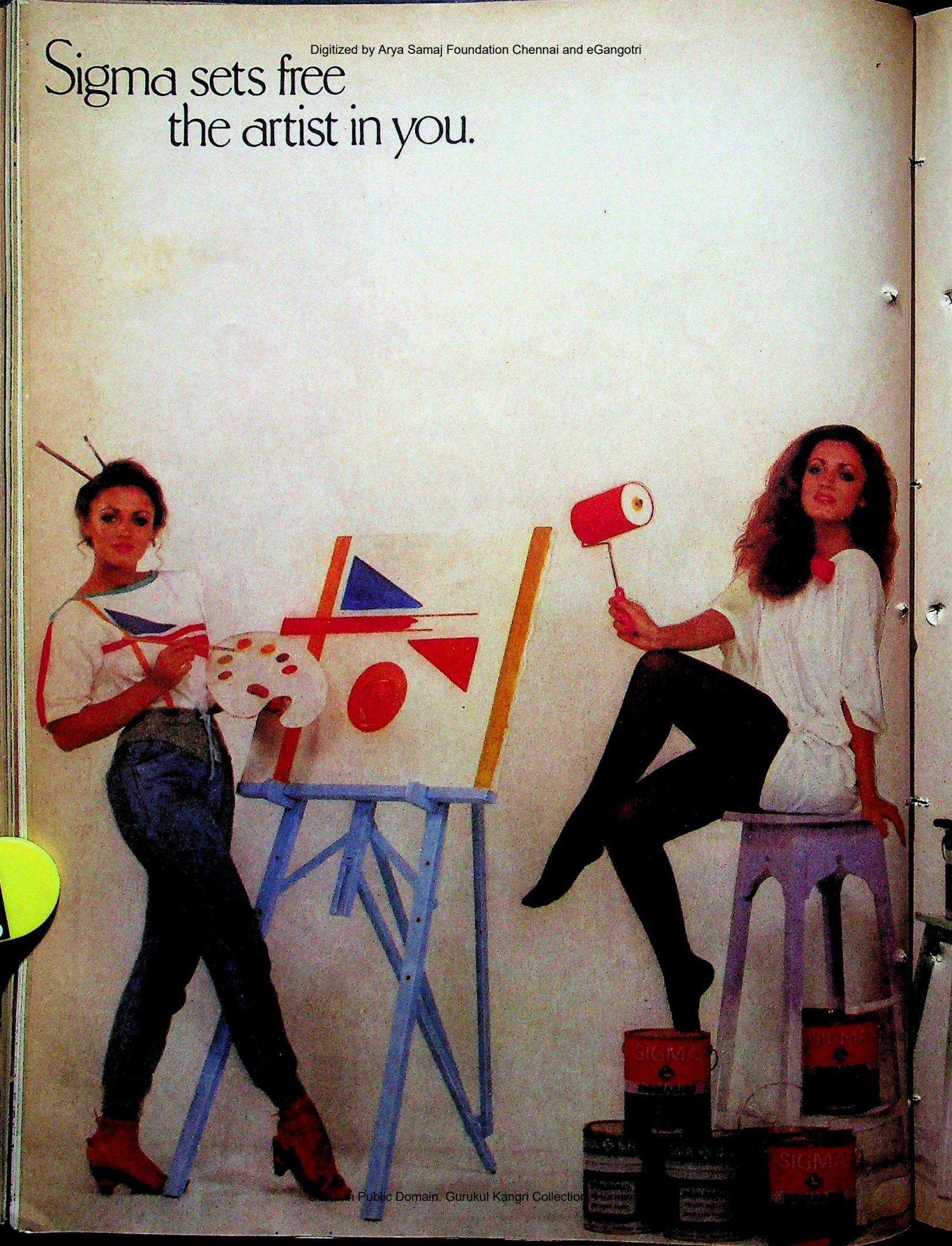
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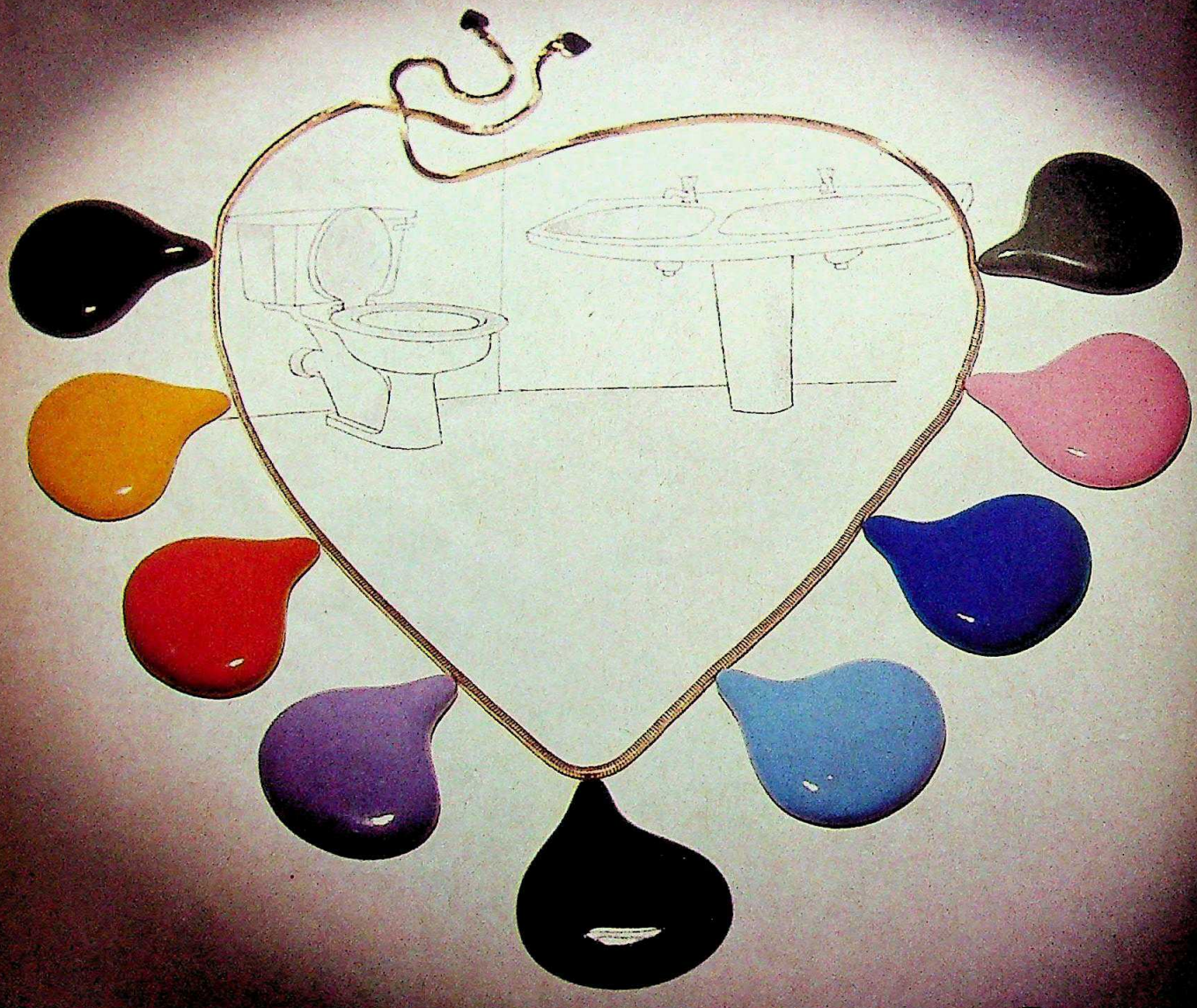


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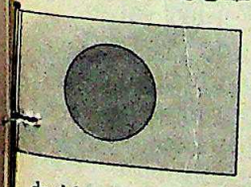
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BANGLADESH

Cat and Mouse Game



THERE were 22 rats caught in a hole guarded by a cat. The cat wanted to gorge itself on the rats one by one, and asked them to decide the order of their conversion into feline lunch. Instead of doing that, the rats demanded to be set free first. Quite disgusted, the cat blocked the hole with its paws.

In Bangladesh, the cat of the parable is universally recognisable as the army, dressed in their jungle fatigues, ensconced in various berths along the hierarchy of the martial law administration, and in no mood to transfer power to the beleaguered rats—the politicians. Last fortnight, a hectic series of deliberations went on between the army and the politicians to devise a way by which the two alliances, the 15-party alliance led by the Awami League and the seven-party alliance led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), could honourably withdraw from the contest, leaving the field open for President and Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA) Hossain Muhammad Ershad's embryonic Jana Dal to march into the arena in a seemingly democratic manner.

The negotiations ended in a stalemate. Said Badruddoja Chowdhury, secretary-general of the BNP, surfacing after a fortnight of underground existence since the November 28 crack-down: "Ershad is asking us to preside over our liquidation." But it was clear that the two alliances, stewarded by Sheikh Hasina Wajed, president of the Awami League, and Khaleda Zia, senior vice-chairperson of the BNP, had very little elbow room.

Comprehensive Ban: Though the leaders of the 22 parties were free, the army plugged all holes in the police administration to vigorously enforce the ban on "all political activities" reimposed since November 28. On December 16, the 'Victory Day' of Bangladesh on which the Pakistan forces surrendered to the Mukti Bahini and the Indian Army 12 years ago, no political rally could be held. Censorship of media continued with its fury unabated. The specific cases against most of the politicians were not withdrawn—thus Ershad retained the option to put them behind bars. Students, who form the most ebullient section of the society, were kept out of action by an indefinite extension of the winter holidays in colleges and universities and postponement of university examinations. Even internal party meetings came under the ban: so the alliances kept changing the timings and venues of their meetings.

The ban worked like magic. The 15-party alliance was the first to back down from its commitment to organise a nation-wide general strike on December 20, 1983. The seven-party alliance followed suit, but endeavoured to save face by threatening to repeat the strike call in the first week of January "if nothing positive emerges in the interim". Leaders were firmly told by the army authorities not to talk to the press, local or foreign, for that would have amounted to "political activity". Their statements went through the censors before publication and naturally were left with no sting. But it appears that reasons for their developing cold feet are:

► a fear that the army will crack down in the event of another strike;

► the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), close to Moscow, and the National Awami party (NAP) led by Muzaffar Ahmed, also pro-Soviet, feel that their two parties would be the fall guys and be the target of severe repression if anything untoward happens: both CPB and NAP-Muzaffar are constituents of the 15-party alliance and were opposed to confronting the army since November; and, most important of all,

► the Hasina group has begun suspecting that Khaleda Zia has been stealing a march over it in the course of the movement.

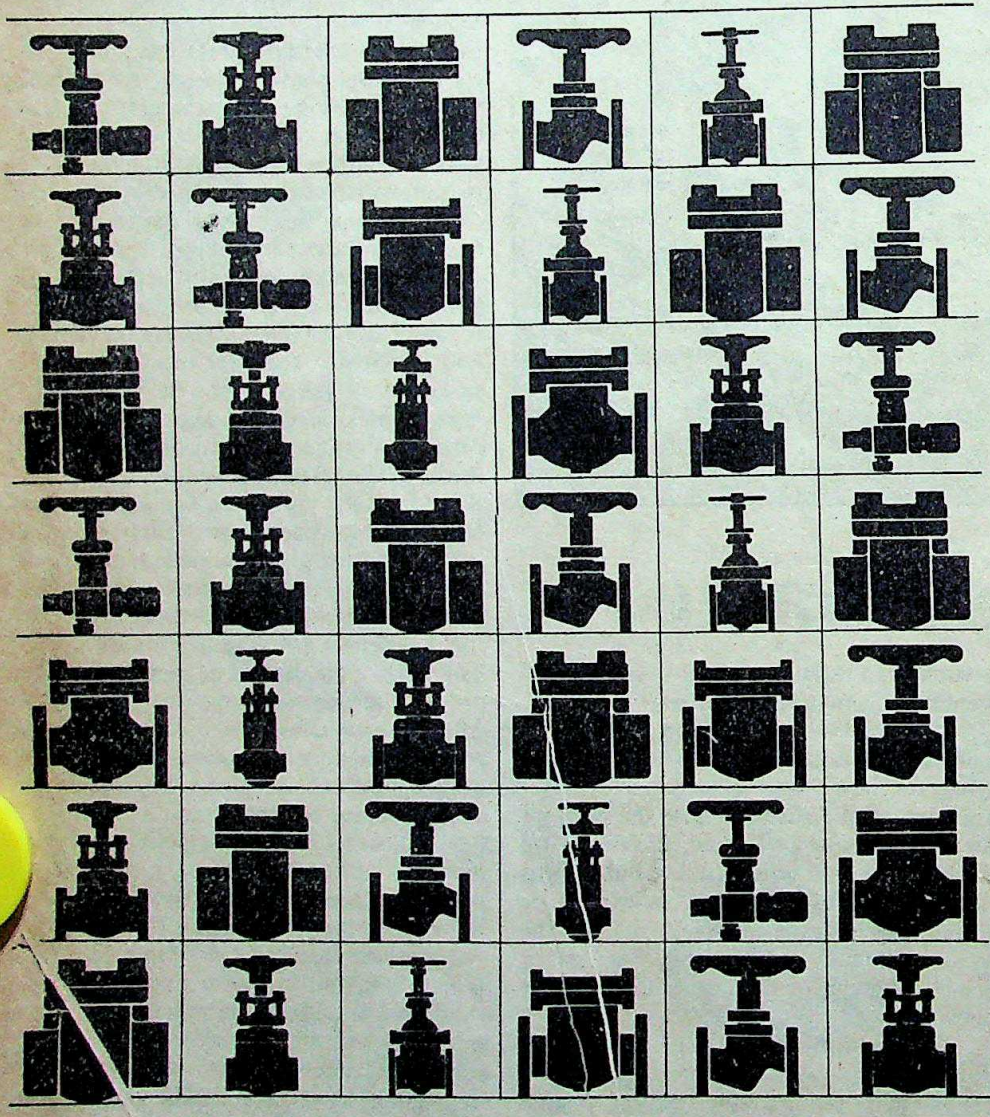
Suspicious Alliance: Much as the army had desired, an element of suspicion pervaded the serried ranks of the Opposition where nobody enjoyed unquestioned authority. The leaders prefaced their semi-clandestine press interviews with the phrase: "Of course we are all united on the five-point demand which calls for immediate withdrawal of martial law and holding of parliamentary elections before any other elections." But the subsequent discussion invariably veered round to "what the other party is up to". Recently, when the martial law authorities offered Khaleda a choice of "either prime ministership or the post of the vice-president" under Ershad, she spurned it, saying that she would not come to a deal with "an illegal government". But the 15-party camp was buzzing with the rumours of her having risen to the bait.

Similarly the seven-party alliance was equally ready to brand Hasina as a "weakling" who had neither the capacity nor the inclination to lead a popular resistance against onslaught by the army. However, the point on which there was little scope for disagreement was that the 22 parties, jointly or

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severally, were quite unprepared to mobilise the masses against army rule in defiance of the martial law regulations. Sirajul Islam, a student of political science at Jagannath College, Dhaka, cynically observed: "Nobody likes to be ruled by the army: it's an insult to the nation's honour. But the 22 parties are all ninnies. They lack the courage to confront the army but expect the unarmed, unorganised masses to face the bullets."

The palsy in the opposition camp was evident from a series of set-backs the 22 parties recently suffered. The seven-party alliance had drawn up a plan to send about a hundred volunteers on Victory Day to the impressive martyr's column at Savar on the outskirts of Dhaka. It had been planned that the volunteers would throng at the base of the column and would not let Ershad place the wreath, which is an annual ritual. The decision was called off at the last moment for the simple and unpalatable fact that nobody volunteered.

Ershad also went ahead last fortnight with elections to over 4,000 union parishads even though the 22 parties had demanded that all elections be stopped till the parliamentary elections. He has so far not changed the schedule to hold elections to the 493 thanas of the country, renamed as upa-zillas, in March—a move which, as an army officer in the CMLA's Secretariat explained, "will decentralise power to the largest extent in the entire subcontinent, and will render an MP-ship in Dhaka far less lucrative than before".

Army Clout: So total is the grip of the army that no political graffiti is visible on the Dhaka walls. Along the highway to Comilla, 85 km away, and passing through lush green countryside and the bustling river port of Narayangunj, not a single poster or festoon condemning the army is to be seen. The army has its own brash, overbearing manners, but, surprisingly, it can get away with it all. In Dhaka, a group of devoted Muslims were made to stay at a mosque a whole night because curfew had begun after they had said their *namaj*. The principal of Comilla Victoria College was dragged to the police station and insulted because the students had come to his college not knowing that it was closed. Forty-five students were arrested.

The army is riding roughshod over the bureaucracy as well. In all the 21 districts, officers of the rank of major have moved in as superintendents of police. Nine of Ershad's 18-man Cabinet (including himself) are army officers, seven of whom are serving officers. Railways, ports and telecommunications, three of the country's super-employers, are under the direct charge of M.A. Khan, the naval chief and deputy chief martial law administrator. Petrobangla, the apex corporation entrusted with exploration, production and distribution of petroleum products, is headed by an army officer.



Khaleda: emotional appeals

The martial law courts run parallel with the traditional judiciary and are equally tardy in dispensing justice. The chief of Dhaka Municipal Corporation is a general of the army. In fact, civilian control over the administration is minimal; a clutch of army officials in the CMLA's Secretariat, a closely guarded complex near the old Tejgaon airport, keep tight control over every sphere of the Government: law, finance, banking, education, information, health, industry, even culture.

Enayetullah Khan, the editor of *Holiday*, the best-known Sunday magazine in the country which tacitly supports the army, described the process as "Ershad's consolidation in power". One of its corollaries is: if Ershad has been able to stabilise his rule, there is no reason why the party that he forms, however rag-tag, cannot click.



Hasina: a tarnished image

BUT ERSHAD'S Jana Dal (formally he does not hold any post as yet) is still to get going. The President-cum-CMLA is not a particularly decisive ruler and is now believed to be torn between two sets of advisers. One wants him to jettison the civilians in his Cabinet, mostly bureaucrats from the earlier regime, and replace them with a band of light-weight politicians willing to collaborate with him in clothing his rule in civilian garb.

Some of his allies in this respect are: Mijanur Rahman Chowdhury, a former minister in the Mujib cabinet who was dropped by Sheikh Mujib himself; Shamsul Huda Chowdhury, a former minister in the Zia cabinet who broke away from the BNP last year; A. Matin, also a former minister and a noted eye surgeon of Dhaka; and Ziauddin Bablu, general secretary of the Dhaka University and Colleges Students' Union (DUCSU) and a powerful student leader.

However, his other advisers are a powerful group within the army. They feel that inducting politicians will not serve any "useful purpose". It is this section of the army which had set up committees at the lowest level for implementation of Ershad's 18-point plan. Now they want these committees to emerge as the nucleus of Jana Dal. About 800 office-bearers of these committees recently felicitated Ershad at Banga Bhavan, the presidential office, on his assumption of presidency. Said a member of the Ershad Cabinet, who has the reputation of having his finger on the pulse of the army: "Jana Dal can strike roots in this country without the President having to rent a crowd of politicians. Yesterday's 18-point implementation committee is today's Jana Dal."

Constitutional Untruth: In Dhaka, analysts, observers and the diplomatic community tend to believe that Ershad will finally be able to legitimise his rule with the help of Jana Dal. As a diplomat said: "The legitimacy of a ruler in Bangladesh is determined not by the circumstances in which he rode to power but by his ability to survive long enough." Ershad maintains that he took over power on the night of March 23, 1982, as Abdus Sattar, the elected president, had voluntarily relinquished power and had invited him to run the country.

That it was a blatant untruth was borne out by a statement issued by the octogenarian Sattar, now bedridden with a terminal kidney disease. He stated: "Since the evening of March 23, all telephone lines of the Banga Bhavan were cut off...officers of the army, carrying lethal weapons, entered my house and asked me to resign and declare the promulgation of martial law. I held out for 12 hours. Finally I gave in, and I was made to read out before the television camera a statement prepared by the army." The statement

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was sent to newspaper offices but killed by the censors. As a retired judge of Dhaka High Court said crisply: "The take-over was illegal, but who is the law?"

The politicians could not challenge the take-over by the army because of their own inherent weaknesses. Hasina, for instance, is not the charismatic leader that many in Bangladesh still think she is. Her credibility suffered a severe jolt last year when Abdur Rezzak, general secretary of the Awami League, broke away with a large chunk of the party's supporters and leaders. Rezzak, who has since formed his Bangladesh Krishak Srami Awami League (BAKSAL), has nevertheless remained in the 15-party alliance, though he is bitter within. In the October split, Rezzak took away with him four of BAKSAL's 12 presidium members, 18 of the 51 central committee members, and nearly a half of the district-level workers.

Cold Facts: Awami Leaguers try to portray Hasina's trouble with Rezzak as a mere clash of personalities. But Rezzak believes that Hasina, since her return to Bangladesh in 1981, was betraying the memory of her father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, by entering into a host of compromises with the army and "the forces" that had conspired to assassinate the Sheikh and his comrades and family members between August and November of 1975. Some significant facts, unreported in the Indian press, that Rezzak cites about Hasina are:

- ► though it is well-known that Khondakar Mushtaque Ahmed was the brain behind the coup of 1975, Hasina recently stated that only 14 officers of the army were responsible for the Sheikh's murder;
- ► Hasina received Khondakar recently at her house on Dhanmandi, the venue of the brutal assassination eight years ago;
- ► she has allowed *Banglar Bani*, the party organ, to be used for supporting the army;
- ► she signed a 70-page inventory recovering the possession of his father's "assets" the assets, worth 1.29 crore Taka (Rs 55 lakh), included gold weighing 5 kg and unlicensed arms. "It is an indelible slur on the integrity of the late Bangabandhu," Rezzak noted.

Hasina's image has been tarnished by her inability to carry the team along, and her general lack of experience. Awami League supporters do not put it in so many words, but there is a general sense of anxiety over the lead that Khaleda has already established over Hasina in what is regarded in Bangladesh as the race of the bereaved women. Impartial witnesses who have no preferences either way aver that Hasina, in her trips to Tangail and Comilla in November, was not able to collect even half the crowd that Khaleda drew in Chittagong, Mymensingh and Comilla. Obviously

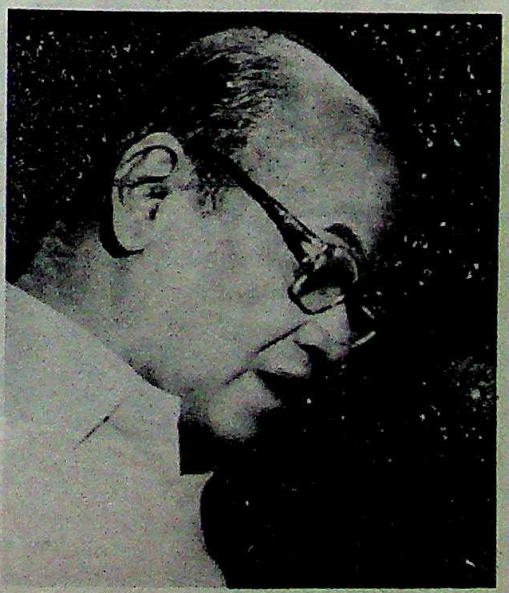


Rezzak: Hasina's loss

women form Khaleda's most important constituency; her public meetings everywhere are marked by long sobbing sessions in the front rows, occupied by women. She keeps her speeches short, interspersing emotion with a sense of power and authority.

Murky Plot: Towards the end of November, she was also bringing in a new theme in her speeches, directly implicating Ershad in the plot to murder her husband. She said in Chittagong, and later in Dhaka, that her husband, the late President Ziaur Rahman, was slain in a plot hatched by a clutch of army officers that included Ershad, who had been made the commander-in-chief of the army by Zia himself.

The truth of the case will perhaps never be known because Major-General Abul Manzoor, who commanded the 24th Infantry Division at Chittagong whose members allegedly killed Zia, was killed by unidentified assailants soon after his arrest. Later on, a martial law tribunal ordered the execution of 12 officers: the report of the tribunal was never published. Apparently, even Begum Zia is not convinced that Manzoor was responsible for her husband's murder. When Manzoor's widow returned to Dhaka from Chittagong, she drove straight to Khaleda's house and stayed for nearly a month.



Sattar: forced announcement

However, besides throwing the hint of a macabre plot here or some dark machinations there, Khaleda has to survive purely on the strength of her party's organisation, her skill to fight against odds and her husband's charisma. In Bangladesh today, charismas fade faster than autumn leaves, a fact proved by the succession of ghastly crimes that met with little or no public resistance, such as the killing of the Sheikh, the murder of four Awami League ministers in jail, and later the brazen coup d'état led by Ershad in 1982. By a presidential ordinance in 1975, issued by Khondakar Mushtaque Ahmed, the then president, the killers of the Sheikh were pardoned. On November 4, 1975, they were sent out of the country to Libya and later on to various capitals of the world with diplomatic assignments.

Historical Perspective: In 1978, Zia put together his BNP on the same shaky foundation of ideology-less opportunistic politics on which Ershad is now trying to build his Jana Dal. He succeeded because of a power vacuum in the country (the whole front-line leadership of the Awami League had been liquidated), and also because of his abiding connection with the country, struggle for liberation: in 1971, Zia was the first officer in the army to raise the banner of revolt.

The situation is different for Ershad who was in West Pakistan in 1971 fighting Pakistan's war with India, the ally of the Mukti Bahini. He was repatriated to Bangladesh as late as 1973. Today what he misses most for attaining respectability and acceptance is the vital connection with the liberation struggle: it is no wonder that he is the chairman of the Mukti Joddha Kalyan Sanstha (Freedom Fighters Welfare Society) and is present, with wife Raoshan in tow, at all functions organised by freedom fighters.

Ershad humours the freedom fighters, many of whom are now prosperous businessmen doing well in the labour force traffic to the Gulf or as commission agents. He writes inconsequential poetry to soften the public perception of him as a military dictator: after all, the poet has always worn a cherubic halo in Bengali society. But he has one real advantage on his side, that of the army's support. Until the army changes its mind, and there is no indication that it will, he can take Khaleda's popularity and Hasina's fading image in his stride.

—SUMIT MITRA in Dhaka

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The MD-80 Th
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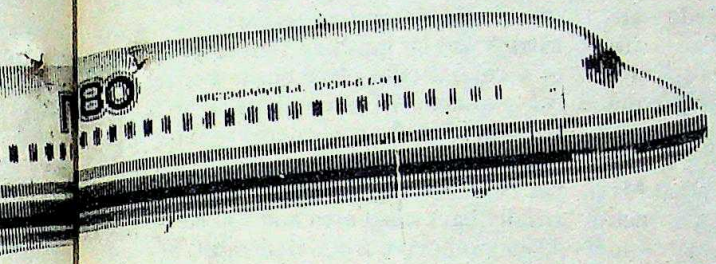


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MEDAK

Broken Promises

THE PEOPLE of Medak are slowly learning that election promises are not always honoured. Four years ago when they voted Mrs Gandhi to power they assumed that before long they would be reaping the rewards. But the grand plans that were drawn up for the district have never materialised and Medak's story of development is a long dismal list of targets that have been missed by a mile.

This was not the way it was supposed to have been. Soon after the elections in 1980 a horde of industrialists and politicians eager to win Mrs Gandhi's favour descended on Medak. An ambitious five-year plan—which no other district in the state has—was drawn up. It was to cost Rs 176 crore. Medak, it appeared, was about to be turned into an industrial powerhouse where poverty would be kept at arm's length. And since former chief minister T. Anjiah, former deputy chief minister C. Jagannatha Rao and two other former state ministers—major industries minister M. Baga Reddy and revenue minister A. Madan Mohan—also represented assembly seats in Medak district it seemed quite certain that nothing could possibly go wrong.

Little Interest: But go wrong it did. Right from the start it was obvious that Mrs Gandhi had neither the time nor the inclination to nurse her constituency. Since January 1980 she made only five trips to Medak and has spent barely more than 24 hours in the district altogether. She has stayed away for more than 13 months at a stretch and two of her trips were made during her whirlwind campaign for the assembly elections. And after her political opponent N.T. Rama Rao swept to power in the state she is said to have lost whatever little interest she ever had in the constituency.

Rama Rao's victory was, however, not the only reason for Mrs Gandhi's lack of interest in Medak. Long before the former film star blazed his way across the political scene, Medak was languishing. An industrial boom of sorts did take place but it was not what was planned. All except three of the 50 industries in Medak are clustered together in Patencheru taluk, where they can claim the 15 per cent subsidy for setting up in an industrially backward area and still be a relaxed 45-minute drive from Hyderabad along the national highway to Bombay.

About 20 of the industries in Patencheru had reached Medak long before Mrs Gandhi since it had obvious advantages. Says K.V.K. Raju, chief of the Nagarjuna group of industries, which has Rs 37 crore invested in Medak: "Our steel company was started before Mrs Gandhi decided to contest from Medak. The difference after her election was to morale. Infrastructure like power, water and land was available faster than before."

Around 75 other firms are said to have plans to move to Medak but they are all apparently biding their time about their moves. Each is delaying for its own reasons but one major disincentive is the Central Government rule that any area which has more than Rs 30 crore investment loses the tax benefits of being a backward area.

The only big unit which is likely to come up in Medak is a government ordnance factory which is slated to start production around two years from now, and which will employ nearly 10,000 people. So far, all the industries which have headed to Medak have only provided 8,000 jobs altogether. And even the bulk of these have gone to outsiders with specialised skills.

No Monitoring: Along with the industries were supposed to come the banks. And indeed a number of new branches have opened during the last few years. In December 1980 there were 48 banks in the district and now there are 111. Even a small bank like the Manjira Grameena Bank, a regional rural bank started for the district in April 1983, has 23 branches.

The catch is that the banks do not really know where their money is going. If the Rs 90 crore loaned out by the State Bank of India was being used properly, Medak should have been knee-deep in developmental activity. Bank officers and administrators admit that they are not really sure where the



S. VENKAT NARAYAN



ANJAN BABU

Mrs Gandhi on the campaign trail (top) and Lambadas displaying land deeds

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"...and then I rode full speed up the mountain and shot the monster."



So he told you, sound effects and all. You almost believed him. Only the other day, he went on a lion hunt into darkest Africa. On his bike. He killed the lion, of course.

He's the most widely travelled kid in town. All the way from Mars to 20,000 leagues under the sea. It's as if his imagination has taken off. On his bike. His new BSA Champ.

The first real bike for kids.

Because it grows with them. As they grow taller and bigger, the bike can be adjusted to match their height.

Because its smooth, rounded mudguards and chaincover are made of fibreglass and don't scratch or cut them when they fall or bump against things.

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What is the power of this black magic box

A key turns in a car's ignition switch. Deep within the car's battery, millions of electrons flow in an unending stream, out through the terminals, the leads into the car's heart, the engine.

When you see over a ton of steel hurtling along a road, woken to life in an instant, you know the power of the black magic box, the Pace Setter.

Ah, you might say, but any car battery does that. But the real magic of the Pace Setter lies in unfailing ability to do it every ti

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pace

For years together, in rain or shine, heat or cold. Without complaint.

Perhaps it is because the Pace Setter has a glorious tradition to live up to.

It is descended from the battery that powered the world's first "horseless carriage" way back in 1891. A battery that literally sparked off the giant automobile industry of the twentieth century.

Another relative of the Pace Setter provided electrical power for the Apollo space missions, that helped put man on the moon.

There is only one company under the moon with that kind of technology; our collaborators, ESB International, world leaders in packaged power.

Willard India Ltd. manufactures a total range of batteries, built with technology no other battery can match. Today over a million Indian vehicles are powered by Pace Setter.

And discerning vehicle owners and vehicle manufacturers are increasingly switching to a better start.

Yes, Pace Setter owners continue to believe in the power of this black magic box.



PACE SETTER

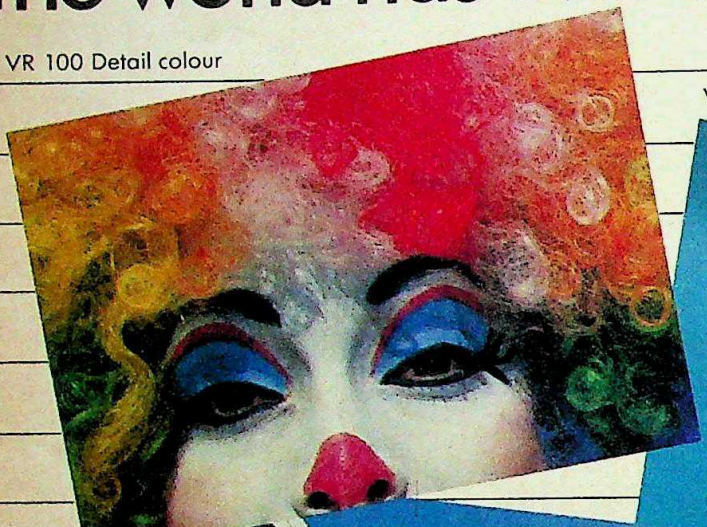
A high tech product from Willard India Ltd.

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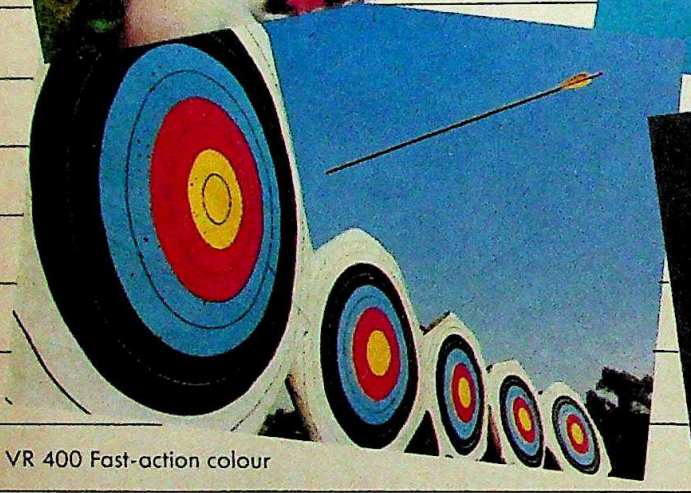
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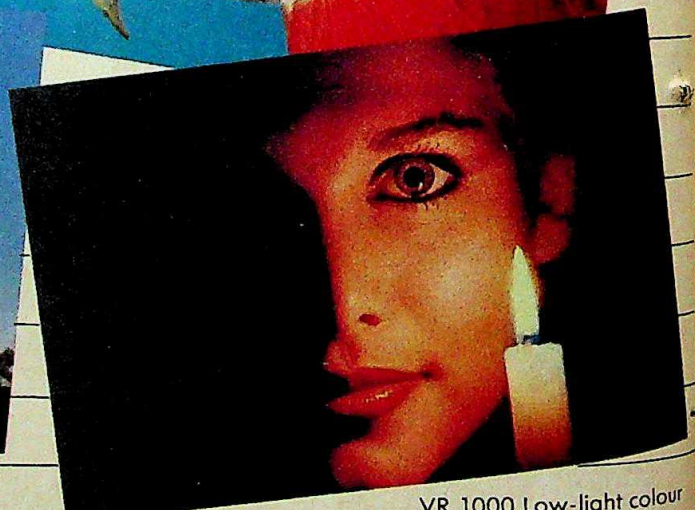


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money is being spent. Says one helplessly: "The lack of monitoring is the weakness of rural banking in which advances are tied up with government-sponsored programmes."

While industry and banks have at least been coming into Medak in a trickle, a number of other projects that were proposed in 1980 have turned out to be complete non-starters. At the time the Congress(I) promised that a sugar factory would be set up in the district. Also promised were a medical college, a sugar technology institute and an inland fisheries centre. The railway line that was supposed to pass through Sangareddy was also never started.

Apart from all these there were promises to strengthen the infrastructure of the district. Like everything else the reality is far different from the much-touted plans. Parts of Medak are still parched, arid stretches without water. An acute shortage of even subterranean water adds to the difficulties. But about Rs 3.05 lakh set aside for drinking water wells was allowed to lapse in 1982–83. Only 40 of the 132 planned protected water supply schemes to have been commissioned by March 1985 have been completed so far. M. Venkata Reddy, one of the three Telugu Desam legislators from the district, grouses that in his assembly constituency, Narayankhed, camels still have to be pushed into service to transport drinking water. Says Venkata Reddy: "All that Mrs Gandhi gave the district was propaganda."

Fudged Figures: Despite the grand claims made for it, rural electrification in the district is also something of a hoax. Tellingly, its most vociferous critic is Congress(I) legislator Baga Reddy. Over 200 of the 320 villages are said to be electrified. On paper the effort looks creditable but the actual truth is that frequently the electricity board fudges its figures by taking power connections right up to the outskirts of a village so that it is technically able to claim that the village is electrified. A more revealing figure of the true state of things is that only 455 Harijan homes have been lit up in the last few years. Besides this, power is often erratic as transformers are overloaded and burn out with monotonous regularity. Says Baga Reddy: "Power connections are given only if the electricity board staff are bribed. Only 160 connections were given in my taluk last year compared to 600 in 1982."

In every other field the story is the same:

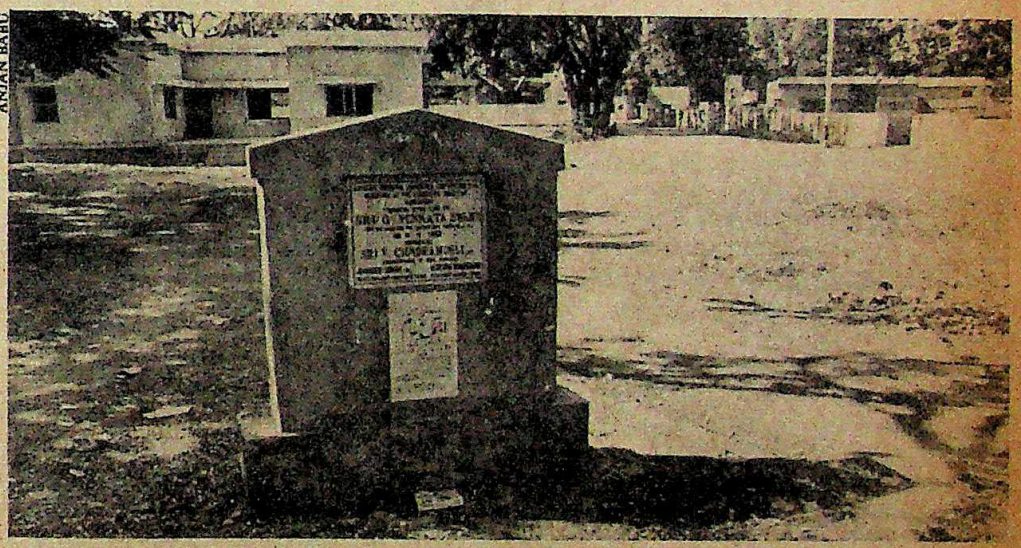
► School enrolment is up from 1.93 lakh to 2.8 lakh, but schools have been opened in only nine of the 118 centres without schools that were identified in 1980. The Indira Priyadarshini College for Women works in shifts and has to share accommodation with a girls' school and a junior college;

► Social forestry programmes are way off target. Only 42 km of roads are tree-lined against the target of 50 km every year;

► Only 48 villages have new bus services started after 1980. Of the other villages, 291 out of 1,229 villages do not have a bus service for the simple reason that there are no motorable roads;

► The fisheries development programme has also been a non-starter.

Party Rivalry: Mrs Gandhi and her lieutenants would, of course, like to hold Rama Rao responsible for the neglect of the district. Baga Reddy, who is a veteran legislator of the district, is especially critical of the Government's decision to stop the Rs 9 crore drinking water supply scheme. Zaheerabad Panchayat Samiti President Manik Reddy, who is a close associate of Baga Reddy, says: "Indiramma has given the sanctions. It is for the state Government to implement the plans." Former chief minister Anjiah adds bitingly: "Rama Rao has given the state a development holiday."



ANJAN BABU

The foundation stone at Sangareddy: forsaken land

That is hardly the whole truth. In actual fact, Mrs Gandhi paid scant attention to her constituency even when her party ruled the state. Many ambitious schemes were never started. Others were started but little effort was made to see that they were completed. A typical example is the story of her handing out land deeds to Lambada tribals of the region. After much fanfare and an elaborate distribution ceremony, no land was ever handed over to the tribals, and government officials insist that the property cannot be handed over since it belongs to the Government. Says Vittal, one of the holders of the now worthless deeds: "We continue to work on other people's farms. Indiramma's gift is a dream."

The foundation-stones that are scattered throughout the district are testimony to what might have been in Medak. Altogether there are said to be 47 projects which never started. In Daulatabad there is the foundation-stone for the proposed bus station. And opposite the Medak collectorate there is the foundation-stone for the home of the executive director of the Andhra Pradesh Essential Commodities Corporation. But while Congress(I) legislators were only too keen to lay foundation-stones, they never did anything else while they were in power.

Political Priorities: The rivalry between the Telugu Desam and the Congress(I) does surface from time to time. In Zaheerabad, a 30-bed hospital was completed more than three months ago but is yet to open, as legislators in what remains a Congress(I) stronghold do not want Chief Minister Rama Rao to open it. And for one reason or the other five collectors have come to Medak in the last four years, three in 1983. The present Collector R. Hrudayaranjan is trying to work out plans to develop the hinterland of Medak so that it can supply vegetables to Hyderabad. Hrudayaranjan's task is an unenviable one since priorities are reset often.

Salojipalli village, close to Medak town, is a show-piece of how development has gone wrong. It was to have been converted into a model village by the Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited. The corporation was to have demonstrated the usefulness of an integrated rural energy system using solar energy and biogas in the village. But the residents of Salojipalli dismiss the new technology. Says Gopan Buchaiah: "The new streetlights give a false sense of security. Thefts have begun when the lights go off at ten in the night."

Now that Rama Rao holds Andhra Pradesh tightly in his grip, there is speculation that Mrs Gandhi may not stand for election again from Medak. In that case the grand plans are almost certain to stay stalled. Unfortunately, the district which went on the national map four years ago appears to have missed the development bus.

—AMARNATH K. MENON in Medak

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KERALA

Skeletons in the Cabinet

DEBATES on no-confidence motions are invariably heated affairs and the two-day tussle in the Kerala Assembly last fortnight over the performance of the Karunakaran Government was no exception. But the opposition fire was considerably hotter than usual. K.P. Prabhakaran of the CPI set the tone by charging the chief minister with a host of sins. Among other things he accused Karunakaran of twisting rules to get loans for friends, permitting close associates to build commercial and residential complexes on land meant for public utilities, dawdling over the recovery of more than Rs 30 crore in excise dues, delaying punitive action against timber smugglers and paying more than their due to building contractors. Thundered Prabhakaran: "Every department stinks of corruption."

The prelude to the shower of condemnation was two visits that Karunakaran made to Bombay on November 30 and December 2. The Opposition charged that the chief minister had abandoned urgent legislative business to speed to the aid of friends in need. One is K.N. Damodar Menon, a Keralite businessman settled in Bombay, who has been charged by the Enforcement Directorate with violations of the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA). Menon and Karunakaran met when Karunakaran was a trade union leader in the Trichur Textile Mills in the late '50s. According to opposition leaders Karunakaran was a regular visitor to Menon's houses in Bombay and Trichur and the chief minister's latest trips to Bombay were to Menon's place.

The other is Nanu Ezhuthassan, hotelier and forest contractor from Karunakaran's native Trichur, whose son P.N. Shankaranarayanan was told by Trichur income tax officials to disclose from where he had mobilised over Rs 1.70 crore for investment in new business during the last two years.

Detailed Charges: Menon and Shankaranarayanan figured in specific charges made by the Opposition. They pointed to the exemption from the Urban Land Ceiling Act of about 3.5 acres of land in Trichur, bought recently by Shankaranarayanan, and the permission granted to build a Rs 1.50 crore residential complex there. Another charge concerned the Rs 70 lakh loan, at a concessional rate of interest, to Menon's Damodar Textile (P) Ltd, for a fibre dyeing unit to be set up in Agali in Palghat district.

Other charges flowed thick and fast:

► The Rs 50 lakh loan to Bhagwathy Estate, at low interest, for reopening its unit. The loan was allegedly granted without proper scrutiny of the security offered by the owners.

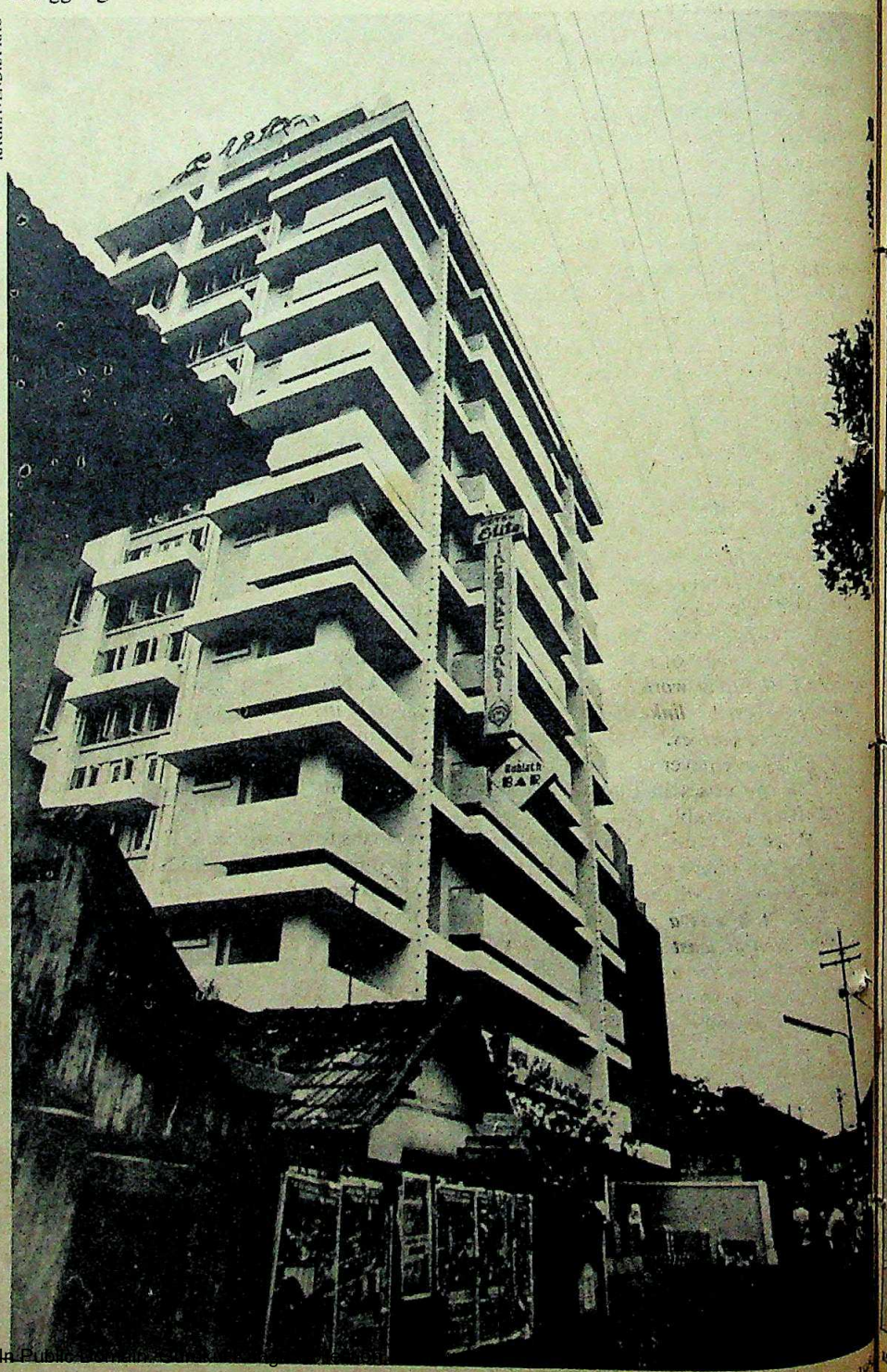
► The lenient treatment of the forest officials of the Kumuli and Erumali ranges of the Kottayam forest division who were allegedly detected by the Forest Department smuggling wood worth over Rs 50 lakh.

► The payment of Rs 46.41 lakh to Hindustan Construction Company in violation of the terms of the Peppara Dam contract.

► The lax attitude towards the stay granted by the high court on the recovery of Rs 16 crore in excise arrears from arrack contractors. Opposition leaders charge that the state Government failed in not asking the court to vacate the stay.

The Menon, Shankaranarayanan and Bhagwathy Estate charges are the most serious. The Menon story began when Karunakaran, who also holds the tribal welfare portfolio, made provision for a Rs 10 lakh

RAGHAVENDRA RAO



The Elite Hotel in Trichur: high stakes

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K. KARUNAKARAN

"I have never collected money"

LAST fortnight, Kerala Chief Minister K. Karunakaran, 67, was the target of a scathing opposition attack. The reason: his secret trips to Bombay, which his political foes insist were to help two of his close associates escape the tax net. The two associates, K.N. Damodar Menon, a Bombay-based business tycoon and Nanu Ezhuthassan, a Trichur-based hotelier and forest contractor, were subjected to gruelling interrogation by officials of the Income Tax and Enforcement Department only weeks before Karunakaran's mysterious trips.

The main thrust of the no-confidence motion last fortnight—which Karunakaran survived with a reduced majority—was his son's alleged business connections with Menon and Ezhuthassan. To establish his side of the story, the chief minister drove for over 500 km in his Mercedes-Benz criss-crossing the entire state. And soon after his victory in the Assembly, he spoke to Principal Correspondent PRABHU CHAWLA *and Trivandrum Correspondent* SREEDHAR PILLAI *on subjects ranging from corruption charges to Kerala's communal politics. Excerpts:*

Q. *Your undisclosed trips to Bombay have generated a lot of controversy. What was your mission exactly?*

A. My Bombay trips have nothing to do with the Government. They were purely political visits and the high command was aware of it.

Q. *Political work is hardly a secret mission unless it is linked with raising funds from secret sources.*

A. I have never collected money for political purposes in my life. Even for contesting assembly elections, it was left to others to raise finances. If anyone proves that I have ever asked for money from anyone I will quit politics.

Q. *If it was a political trip as you claim, then at least the state leaders like the chief minister and the* PCC(I) *president should have been in Bombay. But none of them were there during your two trips.*

A. I was expecting to meet a person who flew from Nagpur to see me on the same day. On my second visit another person who was authorised on behalf of the first person came from Bhopal to continue the discussion on the same subject.

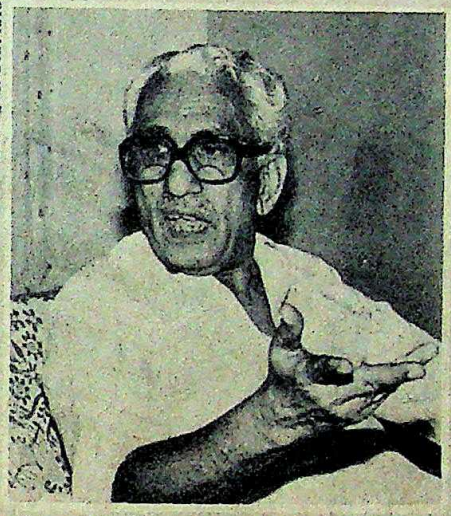
Q. *Did you succeed in your mission?*

A. Partly. I am still at it and hope to complete it soon. We should not waste our time discussing these Bombay trips. The opposition parties have exploited it enough.

Q. *But is it not true that you had gone to save your friend Damodar Menon who is allegedly facing inquires under* FERA?

A. One of the Menons is our party worker and I remember they helped us a lot in a communist-dominated Trichur district. I am not aware of their business interests in Kerala except that they have a textile mill in Trichur.

RAGHAVENDRA RAO



Karunakaran: political trips

Q. *If you are not so intimately known to them, then how come your government granted Menon a Rs 70 lakh loan on a lower interest and that too without even a feasibility report?*

A. No, it is not true. In fact, it will be the only industrial unit in Kerala or perhaps in India in which all the employees will be Harijans and tribals. I persuaded him to come to Kerala and start an industry. But why do you blame me for granting loans to Menon. E.M.S Namboodiripad during his chief ministership signed an agreement with the Birlas for the supply of raw material at a very low rate. They have made crores through those agreements. Can I ask how many crores did E.M.S make from that deal? This is all witch-hunting.

Q. *What about the alleged involvement of your son Murali in the hotel deal in Trichur district?*

A. The allegation about my son is totally false. No doubt, I know Nanu Ezhuthassan, father of Shankaranarayanan, who has bought the hotel. In the early '50s, his was the only coffee shop in Trichur district where Congressmen could get coffee. All other establishments were controlled by the communists. My son has nothing to do either with the business or politics. Except during my last election in which he campaigned for me, Murali has never taken part in politics. In fact, my son has been complaining to his mother that he can't do any business or any other activity because he happens to be a chief minister's son.

Q. *But because of these controversies your support in the Assembly has been reduced. Are you not more vulnerable to various pressures?*

A. Don't forget that a coalition ministry with a majority of two MLA's lasted for over six years.

Q. *But there is a vast difference between the quality of politics. And you have paid a heavy price to keep your partners together.*

A. It is not my creation. I have inherited the legacy of coalition politics left behind by the Marxists. In fact, it was E.M.S who laid the foundations for the current type of politics.

Q. *But is it necessary for you to adopt those politics?*

A. It is purely because of political compulsions. The difference between Kerala and other states is that here in Kerala, political movements were launched purely on a communal basis.

Q. *But you have made more concessions to the communal and politico-religious groups. For example, recently you have agreed to consider Kerala Congress(J)'s request for allotment of over 67,000 acres of rich forest land to illegal encroachers only to keep yourself in power. You know if Joseph's group withdraws its support your front will be reduced to minority.*

A. If I don't give them anything, the Marxists will. I must frankly admit that we have to pay that much of price to retain power. In Kerala, no national party can win on its own. If these communal parties support us then we win and if they support the Marxists, then they win the elections. And I don't see an end to this hard reality even in the near future.

Q. *Which means you are prepared to surrender the Congress (I)'s golden principles of 'secularism' to keep yourself in power?*

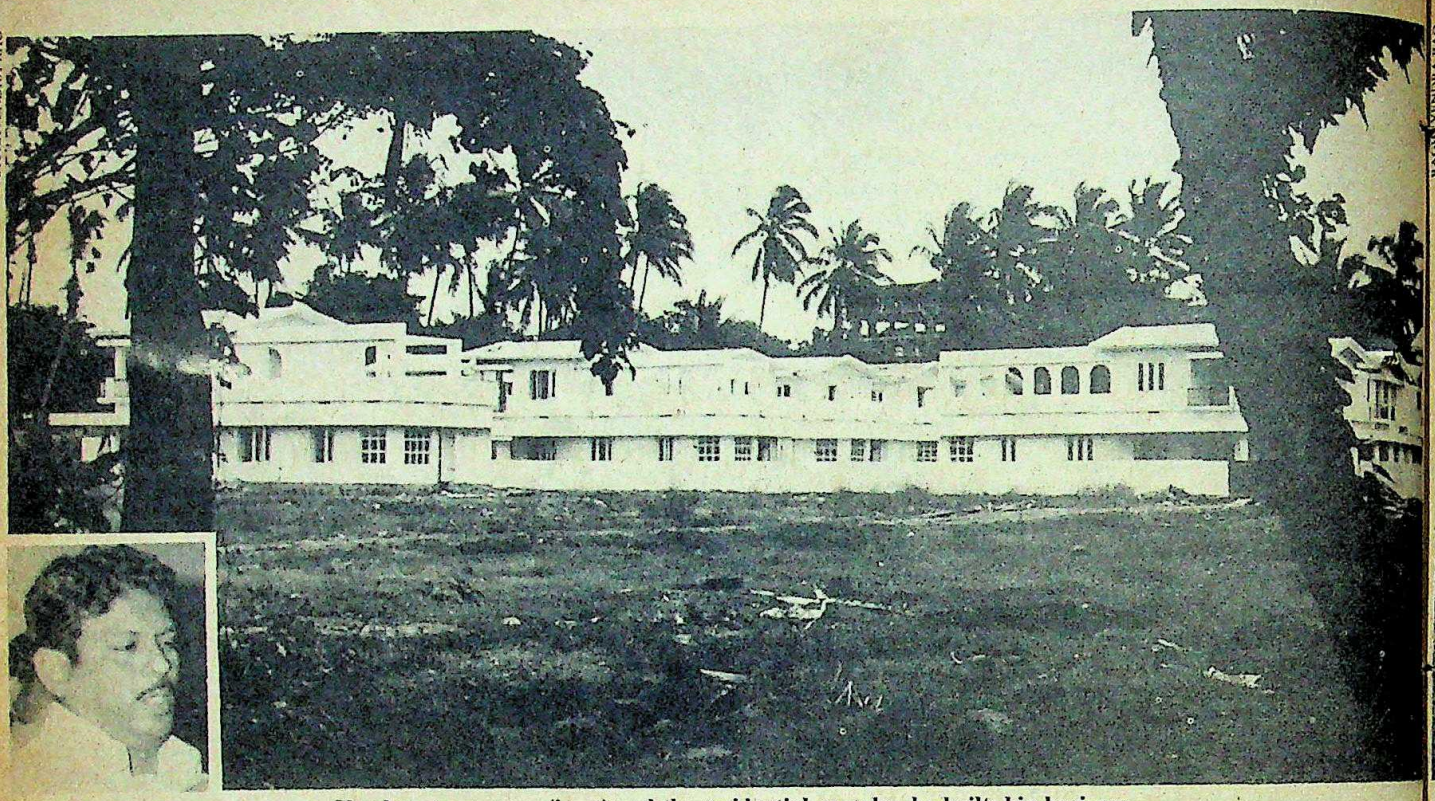
A. I have chosen a lesser evil. If we allow the Marxists to rule the state, neither property nor life will be safe here.

Q. *Last year Mrs Gandhi during her visit to Kerala recommended the review of the state's 84 public sector companies and dissolution of some of the losing concerns. You could not even implement her directives.*

A. Unfortunately ours is a 10-party coalition and my hands are tied on many issues.

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RAGHAVENDRA RAO

Shankaranarayanan (inset) and the residential complex he built: big business

grant in his budget for "assistance for fibre dyeing plant". Such provisions are usually made by the Industries Department. Soon after the Assembly approved the budget in May, Damodar Textile approached the Tribal Welfare Department—and not the Industries Department—with a proposal for a Rs 90 lakh fibre dyeing unit.

Facilities: In July, the Cabinet decided not only to grant Rs 70 lakh to Damodar Textile at 7.5 per cent interest, but allowed it an investment subsidy of Rs 10 lakh to enable him to constitute his equity participation of Rs 20 lakh. As the budget didn't provide for such a huge loan, the Cabinet decided to tap other sources. The order dated August 4, 1983, said: "As the provision available is insufficient, an additional expenditure of Rs 70 lakh under this head is authorised under para 95(3) Kerala Budget Manual. The additional expenditure will be regularised by reappropriation or supplementary demand for grant at the appropriate time."

Damodar Textile benefited in other ways. The Technical Department of the state Government did not give its mandatory feasibility report which it would have given in any other case. In addition the company got other facilities like the five-year moratorium on the recovery of annual instalments, a repayment period of nine years and regular power supply at concessional rates and without any extra deposit.

But the Central Government was not so accommodating. As Menon had export dealings as well, the enforcement authorities searched his homes and offices in Bombay and Trichur several times during 1980. He was served with several notices under FERA. After two years of legal jousting, the cases were adjudicated recently by the Enforcement Directorate which imposed a penalty of Rs 6 lakh for 'delayed' repatriation of foreign exchange. Menon has filed a review petition with the FERA Board.

Easy Terms: The state Government smiled on others as well. The Hindustan Construction Company (HCC) was awarded the multi-crore Peppara Dam project and received Rs 46 lakh more than the contract amount though the work was allegedly not completed on time. The dam was to be finished by March 1982 but according to company sources the project was struck by labour trouble and it sought the Government's intervention. The Rs 46 lakh sought as compensation during the Marxist regime was refused. In its revised estimate HCC demanded Rs 20.58 lakh as additional expenditure on field establishments, Rs 11.48 lakh as escalation costs and Rs 14.35 lakh for additional labour costs.

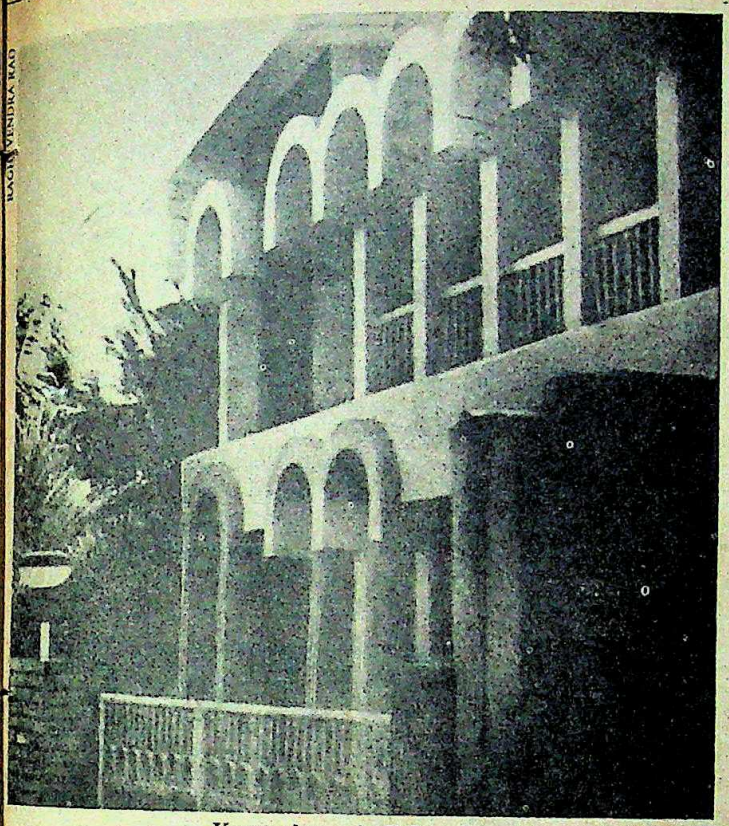
The Marxist government appointed a high-powered committee to look into the demand but fell before the committee could submit its final report. In the new ministry Karunakaran took over the Department of Public Health and Engineering. The committee met again on March 2, 1982, and confirmed the minutes of the earlier meeting, supposed to have taken place in the Marx period. Although Karunakaran was mittee chairman he did not attend and it decided to accept HCC's demand. Government approval came 14 months la on June 23, 1983.

MEANWHILE the state advoc general scrutinised the depa ment's expenses and objected the delay in the completion of work and payment of more money. Karunakaran, wever, denies that HCC was unduly favour said he: "We had only implemented the de sion taken earlier by the Marxist gove ment. The report recommending extra p ment was made in August 1981." Retor A.C. Shanmughdas, irrigation minister the Marxist regime: "Since we did not ag with the committee's findings, I did not prove it. It is only Karunakaran's Cabi which approved this payment." Prabha ran even alleged in the Assembly that th 10 lakh shown as 'Kerala expenses' in HC annual accounts is the contribution the co pany made to the Congress(I)'s electi fund.

Yet another controversial decision the Rs 50 lakh loan to Bhagwathy Estate north Kerala, a unique case where Kerala Government helped a company money to lift a lock-out. The company the Government in late 1982 that it wo reopen the factory—closed since J 1981—only if it was loaned Rs 50 lakh

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RAGHAVENDRA RAO


RAGHAVENDRA RAO

Karunakaran's Trivandrum house (left) and his son Murali (with dark glasses): family affairs

concessional terms. While 200 requests from small and big industrial concerns for bank loans and state financial aid waited, the state Cabinet on March 17, 1982, decided on a loan of Rs 30 lakh. On May 7, 1982—barely two days before the assembly elections—the state Government directed the Finance Department to release Rs 30 lakh as loan, accepting as security the fixed assets and the personal guarantee of the chairman and three other directors of the company.

Later, the company requested that the amount be increased to Rs 50 lakh. Although there was no specific recommendation from the Industries Department, the Cabinet on June 16, 1983, conceded the request. Later it was discovered that the forest land and other fixed assets offered as security were allegedly mortgaged to other commercial banks. But the company's directors and the state Government justify the decision in the name of the workers and assert that the loans were fully protected. Said Home Minister Vayalar Ravi: "It was a unanimous and conscious decision of the Cabinet because the future of over 600 employees was at stake. Let the opposition leaders go to that area and accuse the Government: they will be skinned alive."

Residential Riddle: No minister, however, can explain the exemption granted to Shankaranarayanan for the construction of luxurious residential complexes in Trichur district. The land, 3.46 acres in all, was earmarked in 1981 for the expansion of the municipal bus stand near Vadakkochira in Trichur. Its owners, Chandrika and Kaumudi Wassarier had earlier requested that the land be exempted from acquisition under the Urban Land Ceiling Act—the request was promptly rejected. The Wassariers could not find any buyer but in September 1982 Shankaranarayanan made an offer. According to him the land was purchased in the name of the newly-floated company P.N. Shankaranarayanan and Sons for Rs 2,800 a cent (one hundredth of an acre) while the price zoomed to Rs 30,000 a cent after the exemption was granted.

Meanwhile, the Trichur Municipal Committee by a one-vote majority reiterated that the land should be used for the expansion of the bus stand. Other officials also opposed the move; but they were transferred. Interestingly, the application for the approval of the building plans was made by Wassarier and not by the new owners. Shankaranarayanan has already collected Rs 4 lakh for each flat from prospective buyers.

The exemption for the Trichur flats was not the only favour granted to Shankaranarayanan. Two months ago he and other members of his family bought the nine-storeyed Elite International Hotel, Trichur's tallest building, and another one at Guruvayur from liquor tycoon K.S. Chatunny for Rs 1.70 crore. Chatunny had to sell his two hotels—the second in Guruvayur—because the state Government had served him notice for immediate payment of Rs 1.50 crore in excise dues. The state Government had earlier agreed to recover the money in instalments. But once the deal with Shankaranarayanan was through—it included the payment of Chatunny's excise arrears—the state Government allowed for payment to be in instalments.

Tax Notice: Besides the hotels, Shankaranarayanan's company invested over Rs 1.70 crore in various assets in the last two years alone. Shankaranarayanan and his brothers are close to Karunakaran's son K. Murali and opposition leaders say that because of this connection, rules were relaxed to regularise all the entrepreneur's commercial deals. But Trichur income tax officials were made of sterner stuff and, after Shankaranarayanan's meteoric rise as a businessman, they went over his income tax returns again. These showed that he had earned a total of Rs 31,480 in 1979-80, had increased this to Rs 276,000 the following year, which had dropped to a meagre Rs 8,090 in 1981-82, and was soaring high in 1982-83 with Rs 97,090. His houses were searched, he himself was closely questioned over four days in November 1983.

Shankaranarayanan's disclosures ran into more than 100 pages and contained references to cash received and paid to various parties. Trichur income tax officer K.B.K. Menon wrote him a six-page letter on November 27, 1983, asking him to furnish details of: the sources from which he had received money for buying the hotels and for the

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construction of the Trichur apartments; all bank accounts which held payments received and a breakdown of the periods during which the money was withdrawn; copies of the partnership agreement for the management of the hotel and other fresh business ventures in Kerala.

Shankaranarayanan hit the panic button. As the notice was based on his statement, he asked for a copy. Karunakaran denies that his visit to Bombay on November 30—two days after Shankaranarayanan received the notice—was to bail out a friend in trouble, but opposition leaders are vociferous that he asked Damodar Menon to arrange expert advice and help Shankaranarayanan. In the Assembly, the Opposition even alleged that if Shankaranarayanan had given the Income Tax Department the information they wanted, Karunakaran's links with him would have been exposed.

Sharp Comments: As the notice period was to expire on December 12, Karunakaran's two trips and the subsequent journey of a senior income tax official from Delhi to Trichur have come in for comment. Later, Shankaranarayanan filed a writ petition in the Kerala High Court on December 8 requesting the court to direct income tax officials to stay his interrogation on the basis of his statement which he claimed he had "signed without reading it".

Karunakaran was the target of opposition attack for other matters as well. The communists have charged that he has built three houses in Trivandrum, Cochin and Trichur on which he has spent over Rs 20 lakh in the last two years. Karunakaran's house in Trivandrum in particular is the cause of much envy in the city. The six-roomed house also has an ornate puja room done up in sandalwood with a mini replica of the famous Guruvayur temple. Karnukaran claims that the total cost of the house is not more than Rs 2 lakh and that he raised the money through loans from the state Government. Opposition leaders, however, insist it is worth more than three times as much. Said Chacko: "I am prepared to buy the house for Rs 7 lakh." Asked Prabhakaran: "Where did he get the money? Why can't Nayanar or EMS, who have been Kerala chief ministers, construct such beautiful houses? Obviously there is something wrong." Karunakaran, for his part, insists that he owns only the Trivandrum house while his wife—who incidentally does not work—and his married daughter own the ones in Trichur and Cochin. Said he: "I built this house in Trivandrum with housing money from the housing board in 1977 because no one was willing to rent me a house after I was ousted from power." Fortunately for him now Karunakaran is assured of a roof over his head if he is thrown out of power.

—PRABHU CHAWLA in Trivandrum

KERALA

Confidence Trick

WHEN Baby John, the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) leader moved his no-confidence motion against the Congress(I)-led coalition government in Kerala last fortnight, he could not have been unaware that it would have everybody on tenterhooks. As the two-day debate began, the assembly hall was packed to capacity and a 2,000-strong crowd waited tensely outside. The tension dissolved into cheers when it became clear that Chief Minister K. Karunakaran had survived in office by a nine-vote majority. Crowed the chief minister: "The MLA's have foiled the opposition parties' attempt to topple a democratically elected government through money and intimidation. I will survive any attempt in future also." Retorted Baby John: "He has only proved that he has a lesser majority than what he had before I introduced my motion. Look at the price he has had to pay."

The RSP leader had a point: Karunakaran scraped through only after liberal concessions to the constituents of his United Democratic Front (UDF) and, ominously, three of the 33 Congress(I) MLA's—K.K. Balakrishnan, Cyriac John and Jose Kuttiani—abstained from attending the session, reducing the UDF's strength from 75 to 72.

The Opposition had seemed to be on a good wicket when the run-up to the latest battle began. It decided to strike after trouble started between the seven-member Kerala Congress (Joseph) (KC-J) legislature group and Karunakaran over the sensitive question of distribution of title deeds to encroachers in the cardamom hill reserves of Idukki district, a KC(J) stronghold. The chief minister had stayed the distribution of over 20,000 hectares of prime forest land ordered by Revenue Minister P.J. Joseph pleading that this needed Central clearance. Two days before the Assembly took up the no-confidence motion, the KC(J) at its conclave in Kottayam claimed Karunakaran's action was "betrayal" and decided to pull out of the UDF.

Changing Minds: Karunakaran hastily persuaded Mrs Gandhi during the AICC(I) regional conference in Madras to intervene; she directed her Principal Secretary P.C. Alexander, who is from Kerala, to assure Joseph that his party's grievances would be looked into. Soon after this, Joseph made a tactical withdrawal and threw his weight behind Karunakaran. Said Joseph: "We did not want to link our demands with the no-confidence motion. We will tackle it after the assembly session is over." Admitted opposition leader P.C. Chacko, president of the KPCC(S): "It was our mistake that we chalked out the whole strategy keeping the KC(J)'s attitude towards Karunakaran in mind."

But there was still a day to go before the motion and the Opposition was not going to give up so easily. Baby John and Chacko succeeded in roping in seven dissident UDF MLAs only 10 hours before the voting. As state intelligence men were keeping tabs on opposition leaders, Chacko and Baby John took the legislators, including Deputy Speaker K. Hamsakunju, to a house in Jawahar Nagar. Those present included K.K. Balakrishnan, Cyriac John, both former ministers, Jose Kuttiani, C.G. Janardhanan, V. Dinakaran and Vijaynarayanan, all UDF supporters. Except for Vijaynarayanan each signed a letter addressed to the speaker withdrawing support to Karunakaran's ministry. Vijaynarayanan went back to the MLA's hostel promising to sign later.



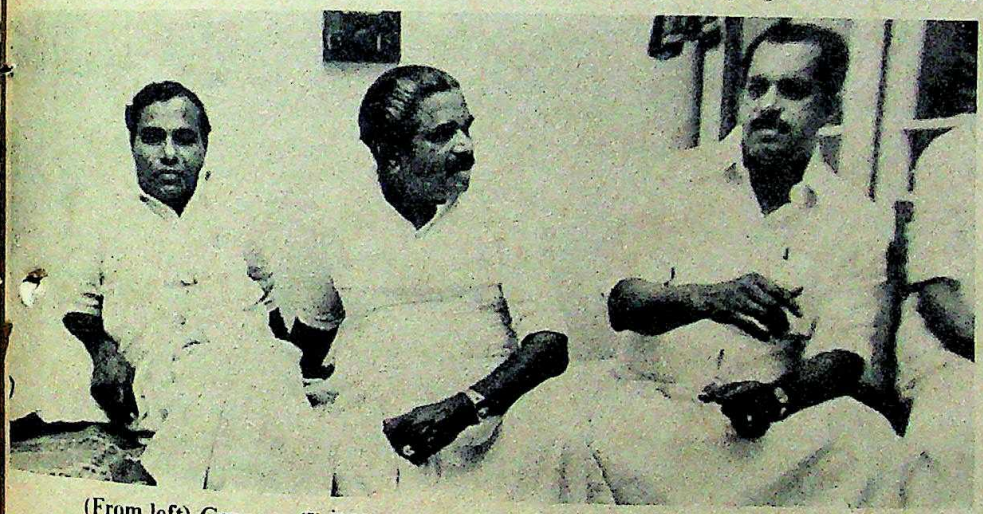
RAGHAVENDRA RAO

Karunakaran emerges triumphantly after the no-confidence motion: skilled survivor

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However, after he reached the hostel, he was hustled into Home Minister Vayalar Ravi's car and taken to Ravi's house. With Vijaynarayanan tucked away, Ravi began wooing the others. He summoned Janardhanan's brother C.G. Kumar from Trichur to persuade him not to leave the fold. K.K. Bhaskaran, chairman, Kerala State Fishermen's Corporation, was brought from Quilon to woo Dinaharan. Next morning, both Janardhanan and Dinaharan voted against the no-confidence motion. Alleged Ravi: "The MLA's were wined, kidnapped and intimidated to get them to support the motion. The whole strategy was worked out after clearance from E.M.S. Namboodiripad." Karunakaran charged that liquor barons had also played a part. Said he: "It is said that even a corpse opens his mouth at the sight of wealth." He alleged that the three Congress(I) MLA's had succumbed to the pressures put on them by an arrack shop owner with "a Benz car".



(From left) Congress(I) MLAs Cyriac John, Balakrishnan and Kuttiani: evidence of shrewd manoeuvring

KARUNAKARAN carried little conviction with these allegations, considering his own record. No Kerala Government has been so vulnerable to communal pulls as his 18-month-old ministry. To start with, the UDF is composed of 12 political groupings, all based on caste and religion: survival in power has meant giving in to virtually any demands. For instance, the Education Department conceded the request of K.K. Nair, an independent MLA supporting Karunakaran, to open the office of deputy director (education) at Nair's constituency of Pathanamthitta. It was by Nair's crucial vote that Karunakaran had survived a no-confidence motion in 1981. But a few weeks after the office was inaugurated it was secretly shifted to Thiruvalla, the constituency of another pro-government MLA P.C. Thomas who had threatened to withdraw support.

Janardhanan's support was secured by promising him that the state Government would concede his request for declaring the birth anniversary of Sree Narayana, the Ezhava community's spiritual leader, as a holiday. Other decisions based on communal considerations are:

- The creation of Gandhiji University by simply attaching 67 colleges to it. Despite a ban on new universities by the University Grants Commission, Karunakaran gave in on the KC(J)'s insistence. Ironically, the university was inaugurated without the appointment of a vice-chancellor, a senate and other functionaries and the Government will spend over Rs 3 crore on it.
- The recent directives to various state-owned companies to ensure the appointment of chairmen and managing directors on communal considerations, ensuring that various communities get a proportional share of these top jobs. Public sector corporations have even been asked to amend their articles of association if they come in the way of such appointments. According to Industry Minister E. Ahamed, the number of Muslim chief executives in public sector undertakings has gone up from one to 14.
- The decision of the state Government to exempt land in Ettikulam—in Ezhimala, dominated by a minority community—from acquisition. A naval academy was supposed to be built there.
- The latest decision of the state Government to issue title deeds to encroachers on forest land in Idukki district. Incidentally, the Central Government had directed the state to drop the controversial Silent Valley project because about 850 hectares of forests would have been drowned. If the Government implements the Idukki decision, over 25,000 hectares of forests will vanish.

A senior civil servant comments on these measures: "Communal politics is not new to Kerala. But now these communal political groups are demanding too much for their support to the Government. There is hardly a policy or administrative decision which is not guided by communal organisations." But the chief minister considers this a small price to pay for keeping the Marxists out. Says he: "These concessions one has to make in a coalition government."

Angry Partymen: Unfortunately, his attitude has alienated his own partymen. In the last 18 months over a dozen prominent Christian and Muslim Congress(I) leaders have either left the party or have withdrawn from active politics. And those who refused to toe the line have been eased out, such as A.A. Kochunny, a Muslim leader and former KPCC(I) treasurer who was suspended from the party. He and seven other MLA's wrote a confidential letter to Mrs Gandhi early last year warning that Karunakaran was encouraging communal forces at the Congress(I)'s cost. The letter said in part: "Our leadership in Kerala has antagonised our own partymen in the wake of satisfying other parties. Divested of the sympathy and goodwill of the senior partymen, Karunakaran was gaining the goodwill of other parties to attain his personal goal." The dissidents allege that while Cyriac John was dropped from the ministry to appease both Kerala Congresses, Kuttiani was eased out because the Alleppey district Christian leadership didn't like him.

Karunakaran's problems are not confined to his party. Besides the uncertainty surrounding the support of the Kerala Congresses, his continuation in power is linked to the goodwill of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) which has 13 MLA's. The IUML and the All Indian Muslim League will be discussing the possibility of a merger. IUML leaders have been pressing Karunakaran to create nine districts, appoint Muslim high court judges and university vice-chancellors as a condition of their support.

In that context, the respite that the chief minister earned last fortnight may only be temporary. Opposition leaders have revived their toppling efforts. They already have five signatures and need only three more to pull down the Government. Says A.C. Shanmughdas, KPCC(S) general secretary: "Once we get three more signatures we will approach the Governor to dismiss Karunakaran's government." Although Left Democratic Front stalwarts are silent on who the leader will be in case Karunakaran goes, Baby John is expected to lead the new ministry with the 27-member CPI(M) bloc supporting him from outside. But given the volatile record of Kerala politics, no one is willing to place any bets on the Congress(I) losing the only government in the south—though all fingers are firmly crossed.

—PRABHU CHAWLA with SREEDHAR PILLAI in Trivandrum

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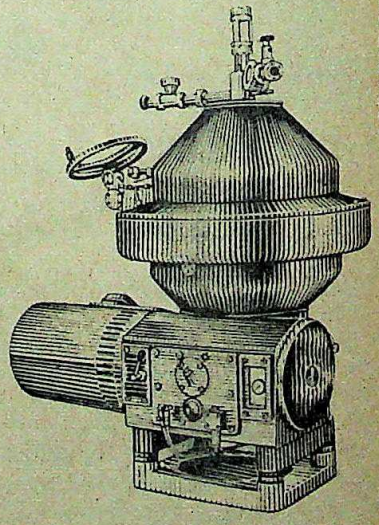
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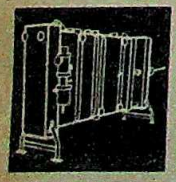
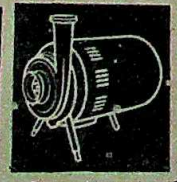
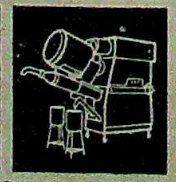


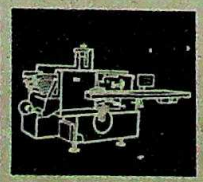
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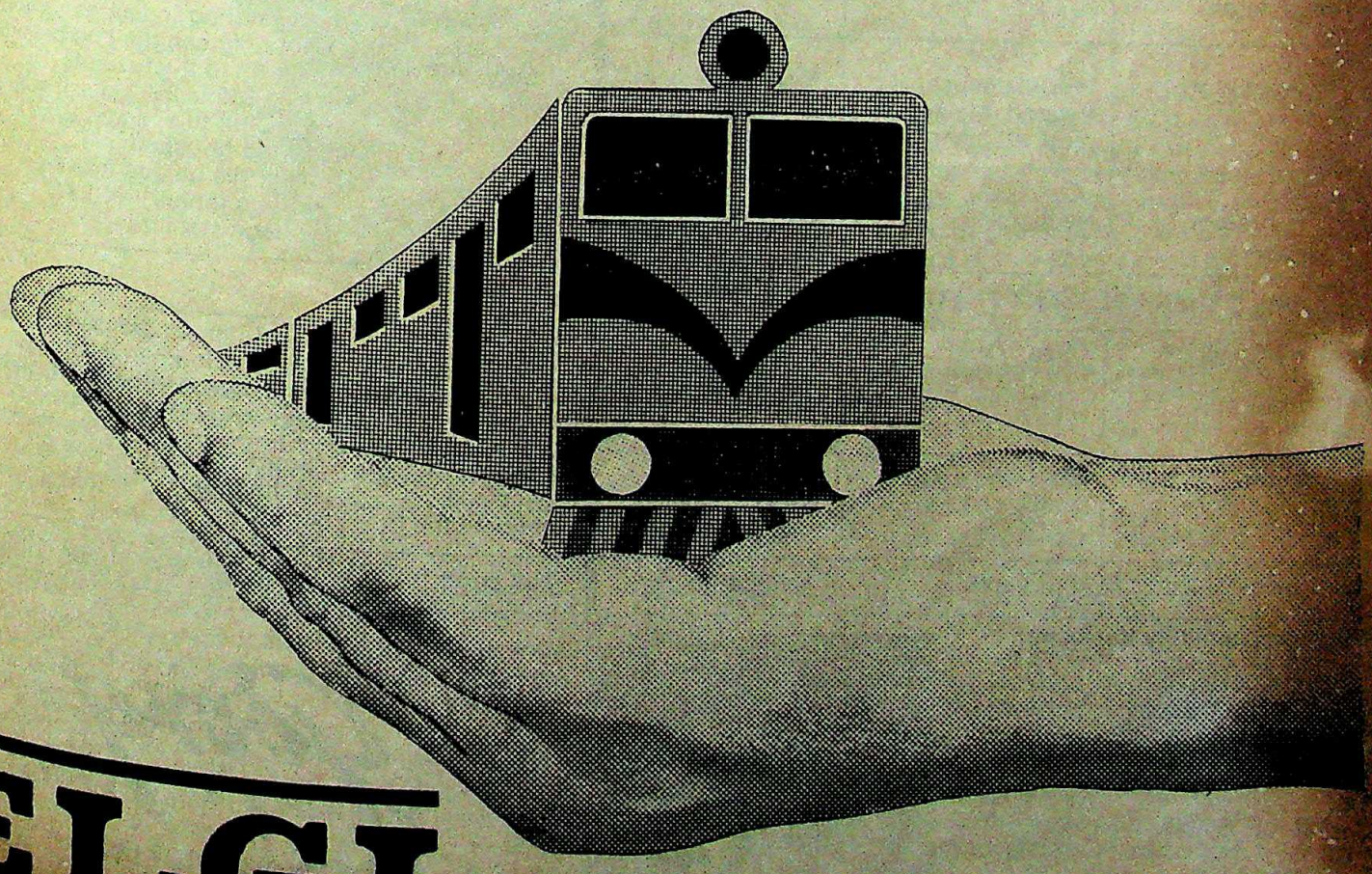
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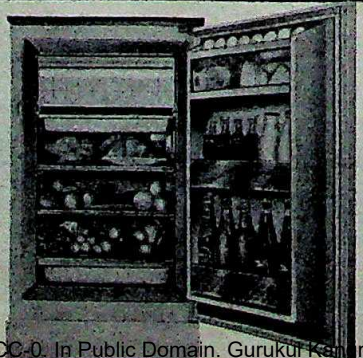
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If you find a better refrigerator than Godrej® buy it...

but only after this 1-minute check.

*FEATURES	*KELVINATOR REFRIGERATORS	*SOME OTHER LEADING BRANDS	Godrej® Refrigerators	
Refrigerator Cabinet temperature (at 43°C or 110°F ambient)	3.9°C (39°F)	10°C (50°F)	2°C	Lower Cabinet temperature preserves food longer
Ice formation time	In about 120 minutes	In over 240 minutes	75 minutes (with aluminium tray)	For your convenience Godrej provides instant-release polypropylene trays
Electricity cost per day	Less than Re.1/-	Much more than Re.1/-	Less than Re.1/-	
Resistance to voltage fluctuations	From 160 to 260 volts	From 190 to 240 volts	From 150 to 260 volts	The Godrej compressor has been designed and built to function effectively under demanding Indian conditions.
Compressor	World's finest dependable and most efficient	Noisy and unreliable	Sturdy and silent	Not only can the compressor withstand fluctuations from 150 to 260 volts, it actually works in this range, even during hot summers.
Compressor failure rate	Negligible	Over 15%	Negligible	With this unique feature, you no longer need a voltage stabilizer
SOME OTHER RELEVANT FEATURES				
Inner Liner	Plastic Liner	Plastic Liner	Enamelled Steel Liner	Plastic liners are likely to chip and crack. Enamelled steel liners are rust proof, hygienic and long lasting
Shelves	Steel wire plastic coated	Steel wire plastic coated	One piece anodised aluminium	Sturdier, rust proof, long lasting and hygienic
Vegetable Tray	Half depth	Half depth	Full depth	Full depth tray stores more

*As claimed by Kelvinator



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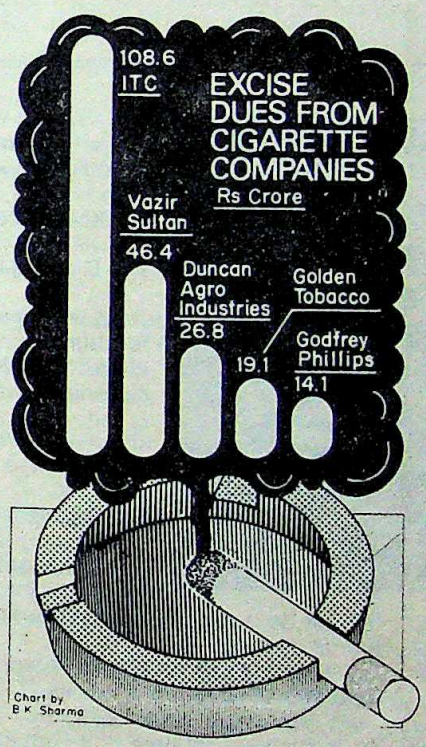
SQUEEZING THE SMALL

THE 20 per cent tax disallowance on advertising expenditure has started hitting smaller producers while the bigger companies get off lightly—as had been forecast. Balsara Hygiene Products, makers of Promise toothpaste, made a pre-tax profit in the year ending June 1983 of Rs 33 lakh. Without the disallowance, the company would have made a post-tax profit of Rs 15.5 lakh; but because of the disallowance the tax liability is 138 per cent of profits, leaving a minus balance of Rs 12.5 lakh in the books. In contrast, an established giant in the field like Colgate gets off relatively lightly—the disallowance raises the company's tax liability from 70 per cent to just 74 per cent of profits. Other similar cases are likely to surface as the months go by, so that the disallowance will be clearly revealed as a measure that hits the smaller producers struggling to establish themselves and who therefore need to advertise more—unlike the already established market leaders.

THE FAG END

EVERY cigarette company in the country could go bankrupt if the ax dues which the Government has calculated are realised ollowing the Supreme Court rder on the subject. A dozen igarette companies together ve the Government an astoishing Rs 221.3 crore in excise ues.

Almost half of this is acounted for by the giant in the ld, ITC, which owes a staggering Rs 108.6 crore, followed the sister company Vazir ultan Tobacco Company, hich owes Rs 46.4 crore. xcise authorities have also pped tax liabilities on ITC r collecting large sums as int-est-free deposits from dea-s, so that the company's ice lists under-stated the full holesale price.



NEW WHITE CHIEFS

THE NUMBER of non-Indian chief executives of companies operating in India has been on the decline since Independence, but the Government seems to have liberalised its policy recently on the appointment of expatriate chief executives. In at least half a dozen companies in the recent past—among them BASF India, Indian Aluminium, Sandoz (India) and Shalimar Paints—Indian managing directors have been replaced by expatriates sent from parent companies abroad. In Dunlop, the number of senior expatriate personnel has increased. Except in one or two cases, the Government has not turned down any application for the appointment of a non-Indian chief executive. It has in fact permitted the fresh induction of expatriates in place of Indian personnel although the company had been running perfectly well.

Official spokesmen point out that it is short-sighted to take a very close minded view of the subject since Indian managerial experts have now started getting inducted onto the boards of the parent companies abroad, two cases in point being Hindustan Lever and Metal Box. Postings below board level are also being filled by Indians. Meanwhile, the rise in the number of expatriate chief executives has been despite tighter tax laws covering their income.

SYNTHETIC DIFFERENCES

THE RAPIDLY growing Reliance Textile Industries has dropped its proposal to manufacture TPA, which is a substitute for DMT and a raw material for making polyester yarn. One reason is the decision by the rival Bombay Dyeing to set up a second-hand (and therefore cheap) DMT plant of a much larger capacity than had been initially envisaged, and a second is the Government's decision to set up a TPA plant in the public sector, adjacent to the Mathura refinery. These would have left little room for Reliance to manoeuvre. The company has meanwhile advertised its intention to go in for a photographic film project. But rival companies are planning to join hands with smaller entrepreneurs who have already procured letters of intent and therefore hope to upstage Reliance in this field as well. But Reliance is also thinking of moving into a variety of other fields, including oil exploration, fertiliser and leasing.

TRIAL ON WHEELS

BAJAJ Auto has lost the initial rounds in its US court battle with its erstwhile collaborator, Piaggio of Italy. The court has ruled in favour of the Piaggio argument that Bajaj did not have the right to continue producing scooters once the agreement with Piaggio expired, and further that Bajaj has copied parts of subsequent Piaggio models and incorporated them in its Indian scooters. The liability imposed on Bajaj as a result of the verdict is however very limited, because of an earlier court order on the subject. Nevertheless, this is a setback for the Pune-based company, which is directly or indirectly (through its dealers) fighting similar suits in other countries like West Germany and which has been refused leave to appeal in the US court.

ELECTRIFYING MOVES

THE PUBLIC sector Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) has tied up with Ikarus/Ganz Electrical of Hungary for the manufacture of trolley-buses. A rival bid by the Italian firm Ansaldo has been given the go-by because, though the technology offered was more sophisticated, the cost was much too high. The first order for 50 trolley-buses has been received from Srinagar, and will generate business worth Rs 11.5 crore. Surveys regarding the feasibility of operating trolley-buses are now being conducted in two towns in Kerala—Trivandrum and Ernakulam—while other cities likely to be added to the list are Lucknow, Kanpur and Hyderabad. The possibility of introducing trolley-buses is being considered for Delhi also.

BHEL is also finalising plans for battery-powered vehicles—for which it has got a letter of intent to install a production capacity of 5,000 vehicles per annum. The final go-ahead will have to wait for a complete debugging of the trial vehicles that BHEL has produced.

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I.T.C. Limited

Excellence is a discipline — an attitude of mind which becomes a way of life

Excerpts from the Speech of Shri J.N. Sapru, Chairman at the 72nd Annual General Meeting held on 24.11.83



Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Seventy Second Annual General Meeting of your Company.

PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

The results of your Company give cause for some satisfaction. This has been made possible by a concerted collective effort enabling us cross the many hurdles in our path. I would like to convey my appreciation to each and every employee of the Company for their dedicated endeavour, and look forward to their continued effort and support in the years ahead.

The financial year of your Company, following necessary approvals, has now been changed to July/June instead of April/March. This change was considered desirable in order to dovetail the Company's Financial Year, more appropriately, to the planning cycle of the Company's various businesses. The results under review are therefore for a fifteen-month period and should be assessed bearing this in mind.

Your Company's Sales turnover stands at Rs. 759 crores. Net sales realisation of Rs. 273 crores has crossed, for the first time, the Rs. 200 crore mark.

EXTRAORDINARY EXCISE ITEM

Members, I am sure, are aware of the dispute the industry has had with the Excise authorities over the deduction of post manufacturing expenses since 1973. Whilst I am glad that the February' 83 Budget and the Finance Act have removed this uncertainty for the future as far as the Cigarette Industry is concerned, the past ten years' uncertainties remain to be finally resolved.

For the period April 1982 to November 1982, a dispute exists between the Company and the Excise Authorities as to the manner of calculating Excise Duty in terms of an exemption notification issued by the Central Government. In the circumstances, your Directors have set aside, as an extraordinary Excise item, Rs. 15.70 crores before determining profit available for distribution this year.

REVALUATION OF ASSETS

The past decade has seen a sudden and sharp escalation in the values of all assets, particularly in the case of land. Consequent to revaluation, the value of ITC's land and buildings has increased substantially with a corresponding increase of approximately Rs. 74 crores in the Net Worth of your Company, the amount having been transferred to a Revaluation Reserve.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cigarette and Tobacco Industry

To look at the Cigarette Industry in isolation for raising revenues, rather than the total of the Tobacco Industry, is to suboptimise national objectives. Moderation of excise duty rates would restore consumer demand and also increase revenue on the expanded volume base.

The Tourism Industry

The Government and the Ministry of Tourism can, with the full support of the Public and Private Sectors, develop an integrated plan to make India a prime tourist destination.

THE ITC ETHOS

As this is the first time that I am addressing you as the Chairman of your Company, I would like to share with you my understanding of what ITC stands for today and the direction in which we would hope to fashion our future.

We see ourselves as an integral part of the Indian scene, committed with the specific objective of organising economic advancement. We are the largest revenue earner and value multiplier in the Private Sector and are market leaders in our several fields of operation.

Like any large organisation today, ITC has to prosper in a highly competitive environment, where human obsolescence is as common as of machines. There are many elements in this environment, each with its own pressures, expectations and stated or unstated aims. Thus we have :

- **our SHAREHOLDERS who expect security, fair return and growth of their investment.**
- **our EMPLOYEES who are seeking not just jobs but careers and are increasingly looking for the satisfaction of a job well done over and above equitable economic rewards.**
- **our CUSTOMERS who seek quality, value, service and satisfaction and the assurance that these will endure with time.**
- **our SUPPLIERS and BUSINESS ASSOCIATES, many of them in the ancillary and small scale sectors, who look to organisations**

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like ours to assure them steady and long term markets and to set the tone for fair business practices.

the GOVERNMENTS, State and Central, who expect large organisations (like ours) to provide impetus in the areas of innovation, research and development, and to contribute to the industrial development of the more economically backward regions of our country.

the SOCIETY and the NATION at large, which expect us to lead the community in following unfailingly high standards of business ethics and integrity.

hese varied expectations put together, form a complex ocean of aves through which the organisational ship must navigate, armonising and balancing them and yet never losing sight of its wn business objectives. Confronted with this task, it would be nly too easy to make compromises between the varied interests , worse still, resort to expedients which would at best assure hort term results. We believe that all these interests can be met if ne charts an organisational path in pursuit of EXCELLENCE.

MENSIONS OF EXCELLENCE

hat then is meant by Pursuit of Excellence and what are its dimenons?

xcellence is a discipline — an attitude of mind which becomes a ay of life so that every endeavour is characterised with the desire keep man seeking to perform better in his desire to forge ahead.

mplies self-reliance and self-development and a continous pursuit knowledge.

ally, Excellence itself is a dynamic concept, for what was excellent sterday may be the commonplace of today. **The very ability of an ganisation to visualise the future and then to "make it happen" is allmark of its excellence.**

CELLENCE IN ITC

over twenty-eight years of my service with ITC, I have had the portunity of being associated with all its major Divisions, and erefore, I am the first to recognise our shortcomings and failures. ually, I recognise that we have much that is strong and vibrant on ich we can build for the future. Ours is an organisation that is nstantly striving for Excellence. There is no resting on past laurels.

is this Excellence that has enabled your Company's cigarettes have stood the test of time. They have been, are, and will ontinue to be the market leaders of the future, vying with the est in the world.

Is this Excellence that pioneered the growth of Flue-cured rginia Tobaccos in India and made the country not only self-liant but a major exporter.

Is this Excellence that has made your Company one of the rgest Foreign Exchange earners in the private sector.

Is this Excellence which has made your Packaging & Printing ivision the largest convertor of Paper and Board in the country.

Is this Excellence which has in a short span of eight years made elcomgroup, your Company's Hotels Division, one of the premier otel chains in the country with a personality all its own.

s this Excellence that has led to the establishment of Bhadrā-alam Paperboards Ltd. — a core sector project — and to the pening up of a backward tribal area.

TURE PROSPECTS

rge Company like yours can progress if the country does, and ent trends indicate that India is on the way towards an economic val I have every confidence that this progress will be accelerated for general betterment.

Reductions in Excise Duty on selected items lead us to believe that there is an increasing Governmental awareness that an expanding demand base, rather than increasing duty rates, provides not only greater assurance for increasing revenues, but also lead to more employment through industrial growth. **It behoves all of us in Industry to work with Government as partners in progress, so that our combined operations have far reaching and positive effects on the state of the economy.**

Prospects this year, as indicated by the trends in the last four months of trading are, barring unforeseen events, good.

The cigarette volume declined after the sharp excise imposts last year and again this year. The steps taken by your Company are now showing results and there is evidence of increasing consumer preference for your Company's products.

The restructuring of your Company's leaf tobacco operations to bridge the technological gap between international exporters and ourselves has begun to yield results. Your Company has actively participated in the Government promoted Auction Platform system of Marketing of Tobacco in Karnataka, for all round benefit to the tobacco trade and more particularly to the farmer. The adoption of internationally accepted cardboard packaging of domestic manufacture in containers, is expected to further enhance the Division's competitiveness.

The substantial investments made last year and being made this year in your Company's Packaging & Printing Division are expected to pay handsome returns. The Division is now poised for further growth

Your Company's major area of diversification, Hotels Division, is positioned for sustained growth in the future. The expansion of the chain in selected domestic locations supported by overseas representation in the foreseeable future, will constitute an important dimension of the Division's growth strategy.

Marketing & Exports Division will concentrate on consumer goods which have a domestic base and export potential. It is likely that we may discontinue the export of items which are fetching us a low return.

As I had mentioned earlier the prerequisite for growth is a solid and secure foundation of profit. Our immediate priority is therefore to ensure growth and continued leadership in our existing businesses. Consequently, major investments are being planned for updating technology in our traditional businesses of Cigarettes, Tobacco and Packaging & Printing, and adequate provision is being made for expansion and growth of our Hotel chain. Several new areas of growth industries continue to be investigated and investments in these will be considered after careful evaluation and at the appropriate time. **No organisation can afford to stand still, and sustained growth for your Company remains our objective.** I have every reason to look forward with confidence to a bright future for your Company.

Thank you.

This does not purport to be

a report of the proceedings

of the

72nd Annual General Meeting.

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ABDUL WAHAB GALADARI

Falling from Grace

WHEN Dubai tycoon Abdul Wahab Galadari's global business empire crashed around him last month, its reverberations were felt not only in his immediate business community but as far afield as India. Forced to resign as chairman of the Union Bank of the Middle East (UBME), one of the largest banks in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) which he founded six years ago, Galadari's fall put paid to attempts by the State Bank of India (SBI) to negotiate a management contract to run UBME. It also caused a ripple of uncertainty for his 500-odd Indian employees whose future is now in doubt as government-appointed custodians sift through the accounts of his various companies in financial, industrial and construction fields to assess their viability.

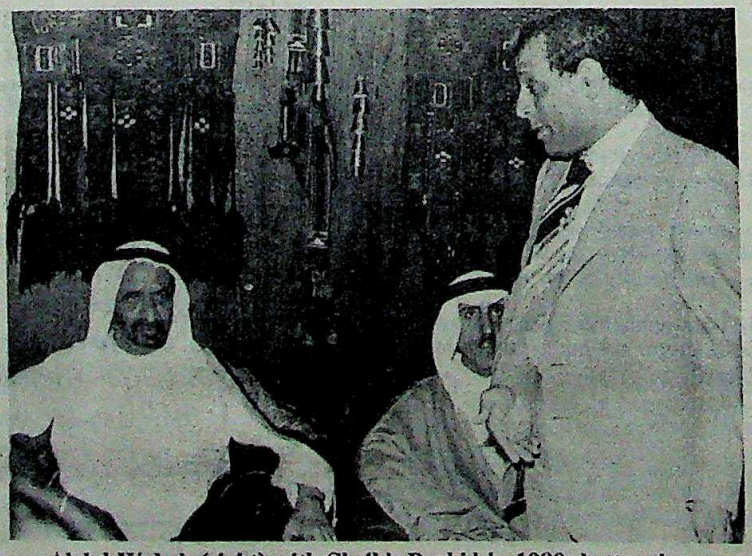
For the controversial bank clerk-turned-gold 're-exporter'-turned-international investor, his downfall has been as phenomenal as his rise. Galadari's employees were waiting for the crash ever since the UAE took over UBME. Not only have Abdul Wahab's creditors been left floundering, his employees have been told that apart from salary arrears they will be paid nothing, neither their passage home nor their gratuity nor other benefits due to them under the UAE law. Some 50 men have approached the Indian mission which has taken up their case and is insisting that all dues must be settled before the employees are sent home. But executives negotiating on behalf of the new management have pleaded lack of funds to make the necessary payments.

It has been a difficult period for those who are being kept on as well. Some of the companies in the A.W. Galadari group have defaulted in payment of wages while the threat of reduced salaries hangs over others in the better-placed firms. Peat Marwick Mitchell & Company, the London-based auditing firm which is going through the books of the Abdul Wahab companies is understood to have recommended the closure of some uneconomic ventures and the sale of the millionaire's fabulous apartments in New York and London.

Dramatic Collapse: The unorthodox, publicity-conscious Abdul Wahab himself has been in seclusion since his release from detention last week. Travel restrictions on the discredited businessmen continue to be in force, and bankers and close business associates who met him described the 52-year-old Iranian immigrant as distraught, devoid of the customary flamboyance that endeared him to the local and international media. Throughout detention when the police kept him in a sequestered house, Abdul Wahab refused to sign away the $400 million (Rs 400 crore) Hyatt Regency-Galadari Galleria complex at the ridiculous price offered by the UAE Defence Minister Sheikh Mohammed, third son of Dubai's ailing ruler Sheikh Rashid. He also refused to settle his loans at grossly unfavourable terms.

Abdul Wahab was released only after his brothers Abdul Rahim and Abdul Latif assured the Dubai ruler that they would be responsible for any outstandings when a final settlement of his assets and liabilities is made by the custodians. The brothers also agreed to take over his prestigious property development projects in Singapore including a Singapore $140 million (Rs 70 crore) loan reportedly signed without full disclosure of Abdul Wahab's financial position after the take-over of UBME.

Following a rapprochement last year with Abdul Wahab at the initiative of some Dubai businessmen of Iranian origin, the brothers are said to have pumped in $400 million in recent months in an effort to bail Abdul Wahab out of his difficulties. But, with many of their companies going into the red since then, the brothers are hardly in a position to dole out such largesse. They are reported to have resisted pressures from the Government to buy Abdul Wahab's businesses at his terms.



Abdul Wahab (right) with Sheikh Rashid in 1980: better times

Shortly before the crisis snowba Abdul Wahab had said that sale of the H Regency-Galleria complex would autom cally pay off his debts — estimated Dirham 2.4 billion (Rs 700 crore). But it seems unlikely that he will ever again be a wed to preside over the extensive empire he built in just seven years after split from the Galadari brothers. Says Ahmed Tayer, UAE's minister of state for fina and industry and close confidant of Sh Rashid's three sons who has taken ove UBME chairman: "Galadari will have future role in the bank."

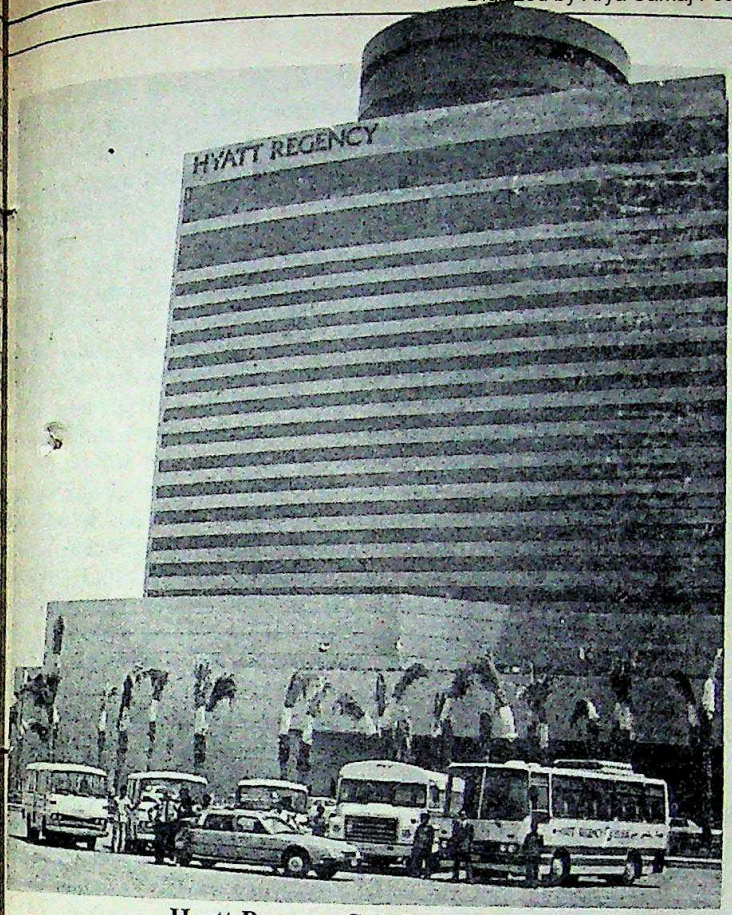
A few days before his detention A Wahab had sounded hopeful that despit attachment of all his assets world-wid collateral for his loans he would still be to retain chairmanship of A.W. Gal Holdings, the parent company contro his conglomerate. But having antagon Sheikh Mohammed, Dubai's new st man who in addition to being the de minister also controls the Emirate's p force, it is unlikely that things would b same for him ever again. Sheikh Moha had set his eyes on the Hyatt Reg Galleria complex and the refusal to sel him was interpreted in the *Majlis* (a me place where the ruler has informal me with his subjects) as Abdul W ungrateful attitude to the ruling A toum family despite everything th Sheikhs had done to put the Galadaris they are today.

For Abdul Wahab's enemies, th just the opportunity they had been w for. A large number of *watni* (sons of th businessmen have all along disliked th that the Galadaris—Iranian immi who came to Dubai only a century ago endeared themselves so much to S Rashid that until the mid-'70s they among the inner circle. Many *watni* also been envious of the fa financial success, and re the string of smuggling that were pending against for many years in the courts until they were drawn by the Governm 1981.

Stupendous Rise: mosity has focussed on Wahab who rose from a the British Bank of the East in 1964 to an interna entrepreneur with in ranging from Hong Ko New York, and sprea such diverse fields as real automobile sales, engineering, newspaper blishing, shipping, co ties, foodstuff and trad

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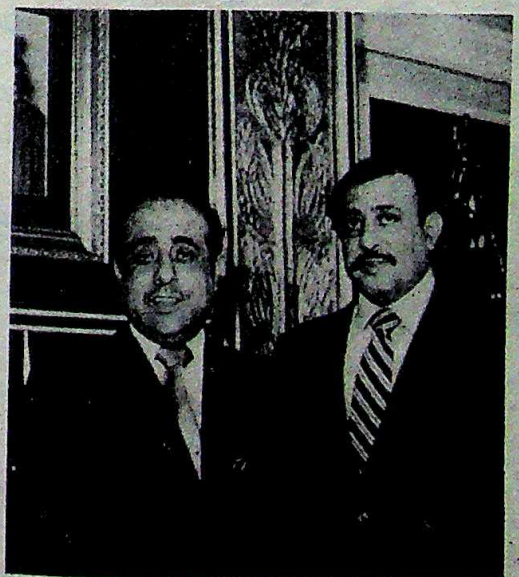


Hyatt Regency-Galadari Galleria complex (left) and the Union Bank of the Middle East: lost empire

many *watni* businessmen, Abdul Wahab symbolised what they would like to be but dare not. Unconventional and unmindful of risks, he plunged headlong into schemes that most considered commercial suicide. His defiance of Islamic conservatism, reflected in the abortive bid for a London gambling club and his advocacy of Miss World contests in Dubai, showed him as a man without the double standards that are so common among other businessmen from the Gulf. He made no bones about visiting nightclubs and talked freely to journalists. Consequently the slander mill has been working steadily against the Galadari brothers in the Majlis and outside, especially after Sheikh Rashid handed over effective authority to his sons who dislike many of those who have been close to their father.

Sensing this, Abdul Wahab, like his brothers, has been trying to expand his operations outside the UAE, particularly in the Far East, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Europe. "Previously I would never have dreamed of making a major investment in a country where I had to pay taxes," he said sometime ago after unveiling plans to build up his London-based Galadari Finance Company into a major vehicle for investments.

The desire for respectability apart, this was one of the main considerations behind a successful campaign started by the brothers in the late '70s to get smuggling charges against them withdrawn from Indian courts. All the brothers had been proclaimed offenders in India in 1977 after the Government failed to bring them to trial on charges of smuggling gold into India while smuggling silver out of the country. Withdrawal of the cases by the Union Cabinet in April 1981 was seen here as evidence of the Galadaris' clout in India and did considerable damage to the reputation of India's political leadership as stories were rife of large bribes given by the Galadaris to leaders of both the ruling party and the Opposition.



Abdul Rahim and Abdul Latif: tight squeeze

THE GALADARIS have met the Indian prime minister, other ministers and senior officials since the withdrawal of cases against them (INDIA TODAY, October 31, 1981) but their schemes for investments in India never did materialise. UBME has given up its efforts to open a branch in India, but Dubai Bank, owned by the other two brothers, is still hopeful of getting permission from the Reserve Bank of India for an office in Bombay. The Galadaris and the Indian bureaucracy continue to be deeply distrustful of each other and this has held up efforts to get the three Dubai-based businessmen to invest in India. Insiders in the Abdul Wahab Galadari group, however, say the businessman has *benami* assets in India.

The financial problems faced by Abdul Wahab are not peculiar to him and stem from a directive by the UAE Central Bank restricting borrowings by bank directors to 5 per cent of the bank's paid up capital. Abdul Wahab is said to have owed UBME about Dh 1,400 million (Rs 380 crore) in loans and another Dh 1,000 million (Rs 270 crore) in guarantees provided by the bank to other creditors although UBME's paid up capital, according to its last annual report was only Dh 291.5 million (Rs 80 crore).

The Bank of Oman, owned by Al Ghurairs, one of Dubai's most powerful merchant families, has lent its directors as much as 200 per cent of its paid up capital,

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but it has been allowed to reschedule repayment of these loans by the authorities. Al Futtaims, another leading merchant family in Dubai, has also borrowed heavily from their Middle East bank, but the Central Bank has allowed the family to find a way out of the problem through registration of a new bank in Cayman Islands and the option to transfer the liabilities in its name.

Spreading Insecurity: Nevertheless, while *watni* businessmen like Al Ghurairs and Al Futtaims have been treated with kid gloves, the attitude of the authorities towards Abdul Wahab has been inflexible, if not vindictive. The obvious discrimination has rattled expatriate businessmen in Dubai at a time when they are struggling to cope with a rising tide of national sentiment throughout the UAE. Nearly a third of Dubai's businessmen are Indians, while the bulk of the remainder are Iranians, Pakistanis, Bahrainis and other foreigners.

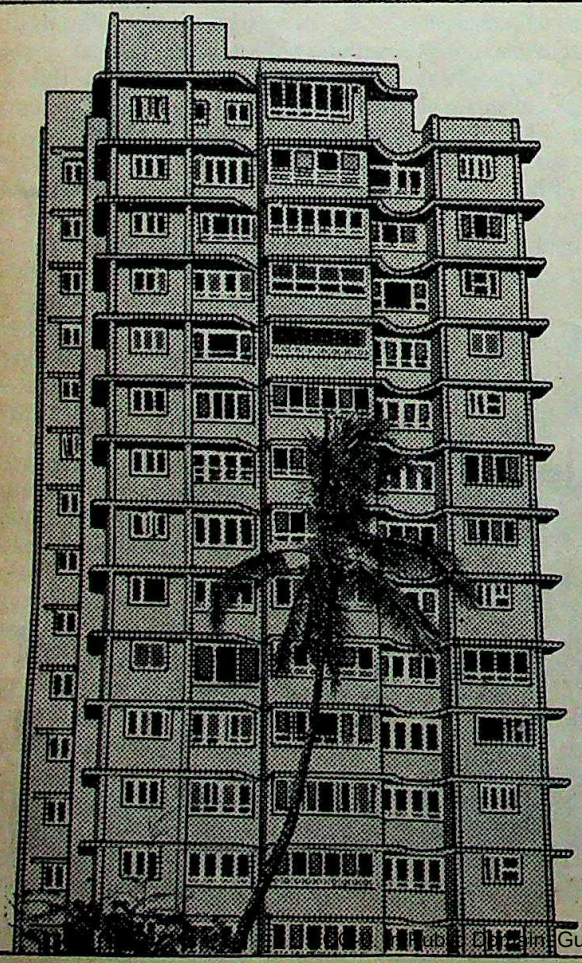
For some time now, the expatriate business community has been feeling insecure as a result of the trade agency law which requires all agencies to be handed over to UAE nationals. Many Indian and companies with large Indian participation have agencies for several popular Japanese products in Dubai. Many of them have already transferred their agencies in the names of trusted nationals who are paid a small portion of the profits for lending their names. But the attitude of the authorities to Abdul Wahab has brought home to them the stark truth that if a naturalised Dubaiian is not safe in the present atmosphere of alien-baiting in Dubai, their position is many times more vulnerable.

Shortly after Abdul Wahab's troubles erupted, Dubai authorities created another sensation by replacing highly respected businessman Khalaf Al Habtoor as chairman of the Commercial Bank of Dubai. Khalaf had antagonised his replacement, Ahmed Al Tayer, by acquiring the agency for Mitsubishi cars against stiff competition. Al Tayer's family has a string of agencies and the minister had persuaded Sheikh Mohammed to recommend their case to Mitsubishi, but the Japanese automakers ignored the Sheikh's recommendation and gave the agency to Al Habtoor Motors instead.

New Situation: The incident revealed that in the changed political situation in Dubai, with Sheikh Rashid no longer involved in the decision-making process, it is no longer enough even to be a *watni*. It is important to be close to the new generation of rulers who have no hesitation in exercising their absolute powers.

There are clear signs that this situation, new to Dubai, particularly its large expa- triate community, is beginning to hurt th Emirate. Businessmen, both nationals an expatriates, are considering a scaling dow of their investments and re-examining ne business proposals. Bankers say there ha been a flight of funds on account of uncer tainties created by changes in the two banks Even wage-earning expatriates are now wa willing to keep their money in local bank and exchange companies dealing with rem tances to India report a 10 per cent rise currency transfers since the trouble start

In the long run, a lot will depend o what happens to Abdul Wahab and his co glomerate after the dust has settled. S senior executives have indicated that they a no longer prepared to stay with the sinki ship. Of the three Indian directors who fo the backbone of his holding company, one quietly looking for other sponsors, anoth is preparing to retire on health grounds a the passport of the third, who has been w the Galadari family from the "re-expo days, has been confiscated pending comp tion of investigations. It is beginning worry the custodians that even if the s cessful ventures in the group were to co nue to be run, they will have an uphill task finding people to pick up the threads fr where Abdul Wahab's men have left th



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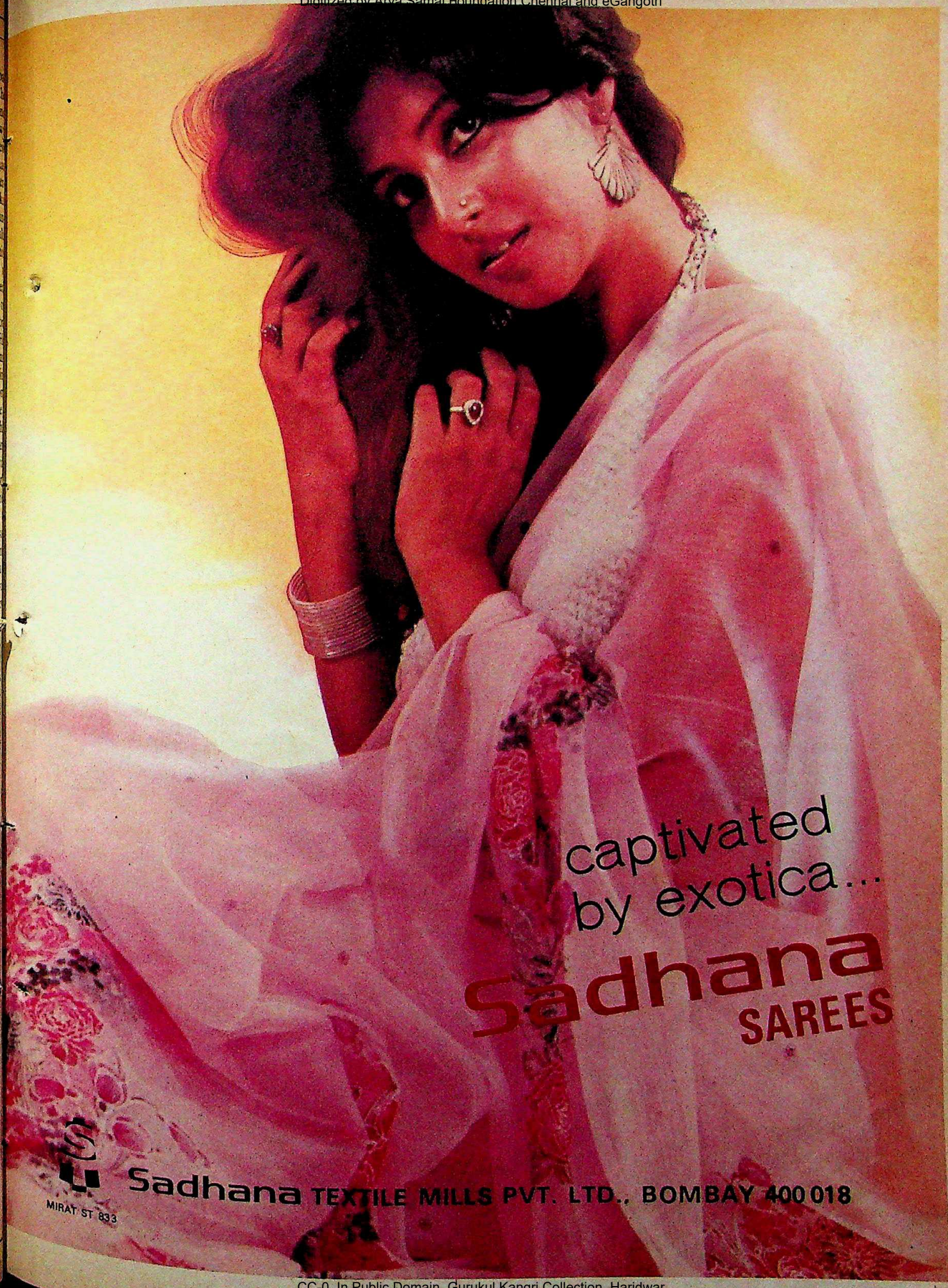
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Mr. Universe was building up his image when... oops!



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But the not-so-dumb belle at the window was quite another matter!

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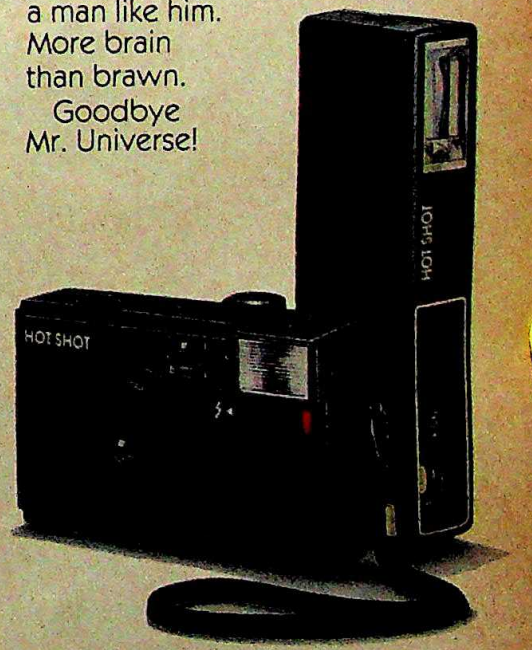
No focussing to worry about. No timings. No aperture settings. No fuss.

And both Hot Shot 110 and 35, she told him, were easy to carry. (No muscle power needed here!)

The only thing he'd have to learn to do was smile.
Well, in college they didn't call him a fast learner for nothing!

Maybe this was it, then.
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Goodbye Mr. Universe!



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RELIANCE TEXTILE

The Investment Maze

THE Rs 22.5 crore Reliance riddle is slowly starting to unravel. Coming into view is a web of cross-holdings in strange companies registered in tax havens and a portfolio of huge investments made by little-known people apparently ill-equipped to make them. The people behind the 11 companies which have sunk Rs 22.5 crore in the Bombay-based, fast-growing Reliance Textile Industries promoted by growth king Dhirubhai Ambani, are no Swraj Pauls making well-publicised, flamboyant raids on corporate giants. In comparison, they are unknown, small businessmen who would prefer to keep well out of the sort of limelight and attention that such large investments are bound to focus on them.

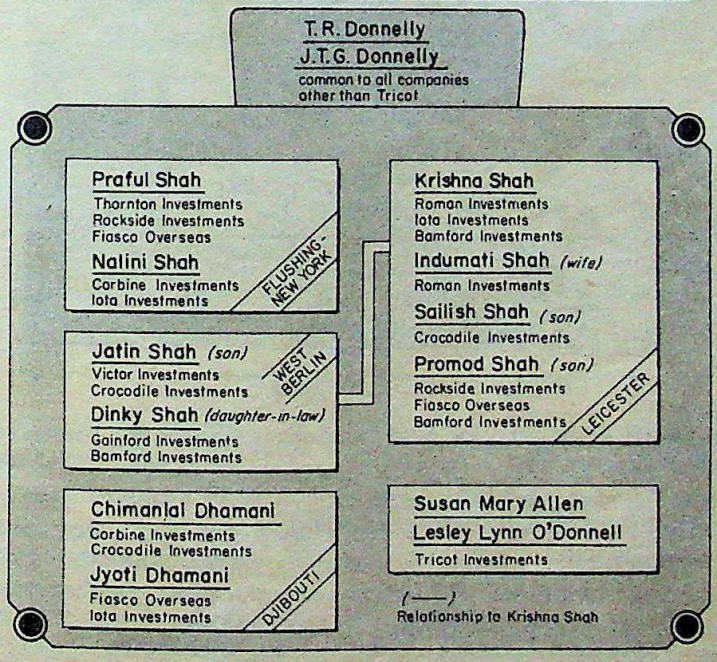
The non-resident Indian shareholding in these companies registered in the Isle of Man between November 1979 and July 1982 is overwhelmingly in the hands of a variety of Shahs, based in Leicester, 150 km north of London, West Berlin and Flushing, New York. Most, if not all of them are related. There is Kenya-born Krishna Shah of Leicester, a shareholder in three of the concerns, Roman, Iota and Bamford Investments, (*see chart*). Krishna is a former city councillor who came to Britain in 1959 and worked as a guard on British Rail before starting his own retail business in 1965. From there he graduated to a knitwear factory which employs four or five people. And that, as far as is known, is the sum total of his business activity.

His wife Indumati is an investor in Roman Investments. One son, Leicester-based Sailish—also known as Sonny—is as investor in Crocodile Investments while a second son, Promod, based interestingly enough in Delhi, holds shares in Rockside, Fiasco and Bamford Investments. A third son, Jatin, lives in West Berlin and holds shares in Victor and Crocodile Investments while Jatin's wife Dinky is a shareholder in Gainford and Bamford Investments.

Common Bond: The other Shahs who have holdings in these concerns are Praful and Nalini of Flushing, New York, who are part owners of Thornton, Rockside, Fiasco, Iota and Corbine Investments. The Shahs are supplemented by three other overseas Indians: Chimanlal and Jyoti Dhamani of Djibouti, and Sushil Vadera of Austria. Taken together, these non-residents hold the majority of shares in 10 of the 11 investing companies. What then was the common bond that brought them together to form a consortium for buying Reliance shares?

If this weren't coincidence enough, there are other aspects of *l'affair* Reliance which have got curiouser and curiouser. In these same 10 of the 11 concerns, there was a common board of directors, comprising two British nationals: Trevor Robinson Donnelly and John Trevor Greer Donnelly. Both are registered as "British consultants" with their address in the Channel Islands. In all the 10 companies, the Donnellys hold between 20 and 40 per cent of the share capital, while the remaining 60 to 80 per cent is held by a variety of Shahs and others with Indian names.

Shareholders in the Isle of Man Companies



There are other similarities too. In all the 10 companies the nominal share capital is £2,000 (Rs 34,000), while the subscribed capital is £200 (Rs 3,400). All the companies are serviced by Signet Corporate Company Secretaries Ltd, which appears to belong to the Donnellys. The companies also have a common address: Tower Street Centre, Ramsey, Isle of Man.

Curious Aspects: While the investing companies have a share capital of no more than £200, only three companies seem to have borrowed money from a bank to finance the huge Reliance share purchases: these are Thornton Investments, Gainford Investments and Victor Investments. Once again, the odd fact is that all three have borrowed identical sums of $1.65 million (Rs 1.65 crore) each from the Colombo branch of the European Asian Bank—the borrowings being on the same day, October 26, 1982. All three companies have also purchased Reliance shares at an identical price of about Rs 128 per share.

Interestingly, the agreement with the Colombo bank binds the investing companies to up the collateral by an amount specified by the bank in the event that the value of Reliance share falls below Rs 147.25.

The 11 companies, which were registered in the Isle of Man at different times between November 1979 and July 1982, appear to have undertaken no activity other than the acquisition of the Reliance shares. Notwithstanding the still unexplained registration of doubles with the same name in the UK after the date on which the investments in Reliance were made, and the embarrassment this caused Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee who was twice obliged to change his statement to Parliament, the entire operation seems to have been well coordinated.

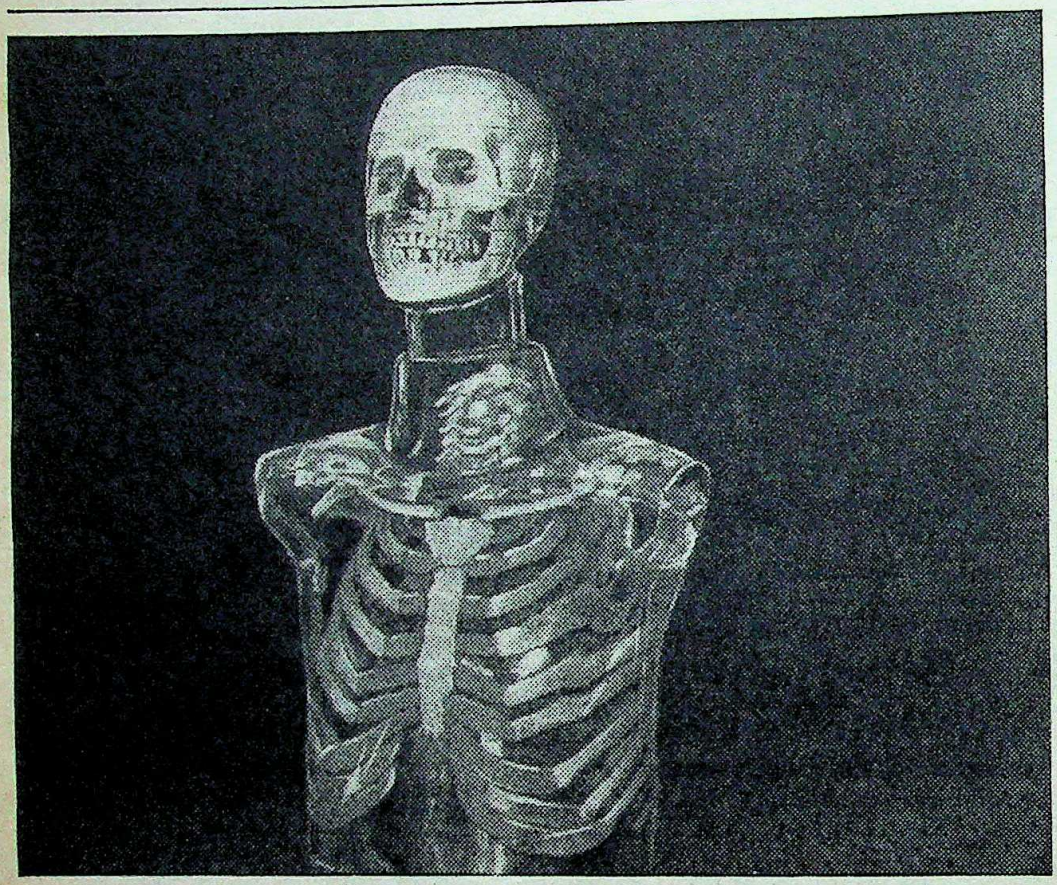
Clearly, the investing companies were acting in concert, taking their decision in unison and virtually acting as an investing consortium. They also seemed to be remarkably well informed of what the Indian Government was doing. The ceiling on non-resident investment of Rs 1 lakh on share investments in any one Indian company by non-resident Indians was lifted on August 20, 1982. Just three days later three of the Isle of Man companies—Thornton, Victor and Gainford—applied to the Reserve Bank to invest more than Rs 2 crore each in Reliance shares. Four other companies—Roman, Bamford, Crocodile and Fiasco—applied together a month later, on September 24. At least six of the companies made their investment in Reliance shares on the same day—October 15.

Nevertheless, when contacted on the telephone by INDIA TODAY at his home in Leicester, Krishna Shah disowned any knowledge of the links, declined to answer questions and finally terminated the conversation abruptly. In fact the telephone call yielded a most curious response. Identifying himself as Krishna, Shah said that he had made some small investments in Reliance some years ago, he didn't remember precisely when. He had not invested any sums in the company either in 1982 or 1983, and claimed to know nothing about the existence of the investing companies in the Isle of Man.

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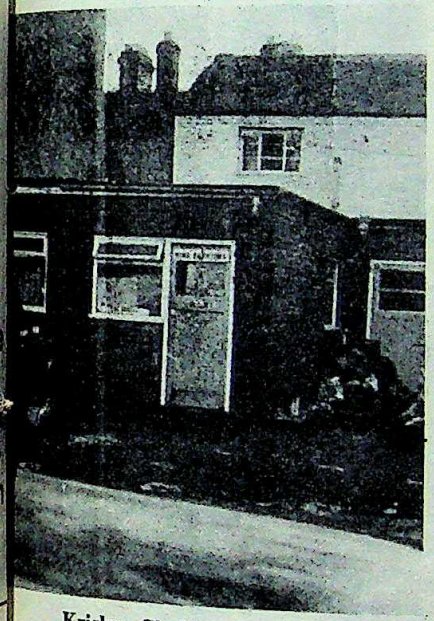
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GETTING progressively more cautious on the telephone, Shah insisted that these were personal matters, and ally claimed that he was not Krishna ah after all but Kundan Shah. Krishna ah, he said, was out of Leicester, and he d not heard of either Promod, Indumati or ilish Shah (all of whom have the same dress as Krishna Shah). Kundan Shah id however that he was related to Krishna ah, and stated that it was a "family relaonship".

The telephonic interview was cut short hen Shah disconnected the line; subseent attempts to re-establish contact were ustrated because the line would be disconcted again—which happened four times.



Krishna Shah's knitwear factory: illequipped?

d, on checking with the operator, it was that Shah had at the start identified self to the operator as Krishna Shah, e it was a specific call for Krishna Shah. The sudden reluctance to continue the versation could well have been because desire for privacy regarding personal inments, but Shah had also said during the versation that he had not been in contact h India for many years, that he had not rd of INDIA TODAY and that he did not w of any controversy regarding non-resi- investments in Reliance Textiles. He feigned ignorance of the other Shahs in t Berlin and Flushing. Finally, he soun- far from being someone who had ter-minded the overseas investment in iance.

The strong possibility that is suggested Shah's ignorance of the investment conersy, and by the fact that the operations all 11 companies seem to have been ter-minded by a single person, is that the investing companies are dummy creations, with both the shareholders as well as the directors being front men for the real investor whose identity remains unknown.

The one company which has a slightly different pattern from the others is Tricot Investments. To start with, while all the other investment companies forked out over Rs 2 crore each for Reliance shares, Tricot invested only Rs 42.5 lakh. While the other companies made their investments in 1982, Tricot did so in early 1983. And while all the other companies have a common set of directors and a variety of Shahs as their major shareholders, Tricot once again is different.

Different Company: Tricot has a total share capital of two shares of £1 each, held by two British nationals, Susan Mary Allen and Lesley Lynne O' Donnell, who were also directors of the company after it was formed on July 12, 1982. But both resigned their directorships a little over a month later, August 25, 1982—five days after the Government abolished the Rs 1 lakh ceiling on investment in any one company—and three new directors came on the board. The shareholding, however, continued to remain in British hands, going by the company's records, and it is not clear how Tricot qualified as a non-resident company (for which 60 per cent of the share capital must be in non-resident Indian hands).

The interesting part of the new board of directors in Tricot was that one of the new directors, Haren Chimanlal Choksi, co-opted on to the board in March 1983, gave his address in New Delhi. The telephone number at this address was, however, in somebody else's name, as was the name on the door. Enquiries with people in the house disclosed that Choksi did in fact live there, but was away in Mathura. It was not immediately clear how someone living in India could be a director on an Isle of Man company claiming non-resident status.

Lingering Questions: Obviously there were other questions which urgently called for answers. For a start, although the investments were made by 11 different companies, the evidence increasingly suggested that the investments had been coordinated by a single hand. The central question remained: whose hand was it? Second, there seemed to have been an inter-meshing in the timing of the Government's and the investing companies' actions. So was there official collusion?

Third, why did the shareholders of the investing companies seem to know little about the investments made by the companies?

And fourth, eight of the 11 companies, operating on minuscule share capital, had been able to make investments running into crores of rupees without any apparent source of funds. Where did the money come from?

—T.N. NINAN with bureau reports

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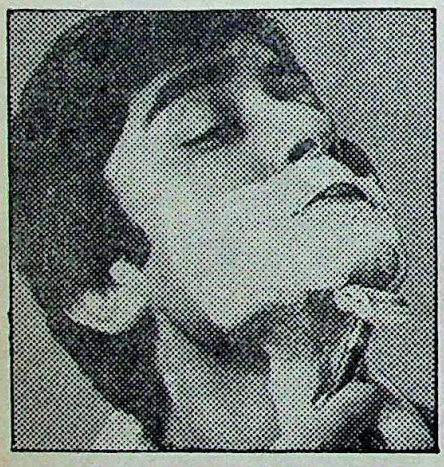
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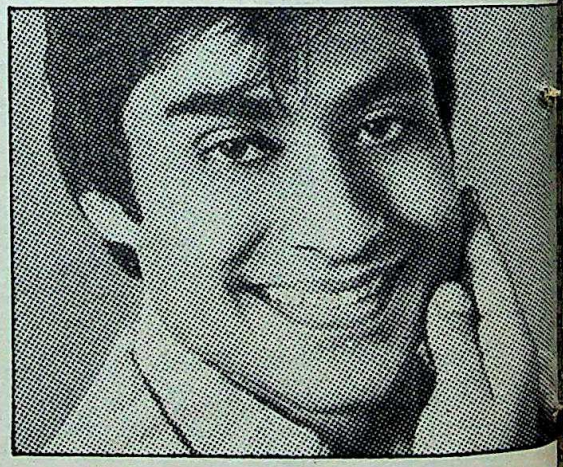












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ETAILING

Boycott Power

FOR CORPORATE managers just barely getting used to collective bargaining by labour, the dramatic new use of this technique by Bombay retailers will come as a severe jolt. It started with the drugs industry, when the All-India Organisation of Chemists and Druggists (AIOCD) and its militant Bombay affiliate the Retail and Dispensing Chemists Association (RDCA) gained increased distribution margins from manufacturers (INDIA TODAY, November 30, 1981). And this fortnight, the technique of selective trade boycotts will be extended to food products, toiletries and cosmetics.

Coming together under a powerful Council of Traders Associations (COTA) last November, 14 trade associations representing 35,000 retailers and wholesalers in the Bombay-Thane belt threatened a series of boycotts aimed at leading retail brands if the margins allowed to them by manufacturers were not raised from the existing 5 to 10 per cent of selling price to a flat 20 per cent.



Kishor Shah: counter moves

"Having succeeded in our war against pharmaceutical manufacturers, we felt we should extend our agitation to toiletries, beverages, packaged foods and cosmetics, which we also stock in chemist's shops," said druggist Kishor Shah, who as secretary of RDCA masterminded the boycott against the products of a number of leading drug companies. "So I have spent the last three months bringing together every retailer who markets these, and now COTA will launch a war against these manufacturers too."

Concerted Strategy: To start with, the tobacco vendors, grain dealers, provision merchants, and chemists will hit at the well-known brands marketed by Food Specialities, the Indian subsidiary of the Swiss baby food and coffee giant, Nestle's. Aiming next at the leading soap and fat manufacturer, Hindustan Lever, and spreading this in stages to include the Tata Oil Mills, Kaira district cooperative's Amul, and other well entrenched brands, COTA hopes to gradually break down manufacturer resistance and join in across-the-board hikes in retail and wholesale margins.

An estimated Rs 6 crore of Nestle's Rs 64.54 crore 1982 sales came from the Bombay territory, and Lever sells almost Rs 40 crore worth of soaps, detergents and edible fats in this market. Shah reckons that if he can bring these giants to their knees, all smaller companies will pliantly follow.

The strategy has worked in the past. Starting in 1980 with a boycott of the pharmaceuticals giant Sarabhai Chemicals led by Shah and fellow campaigner Vinubhai Umedchand of AIOCD, extended their "non-cooperation" to Vicks manufacturer Richardson Hindustan, Complan manufacturer Glaxo, Iodex-makers Smith, Kline and French and a string of other manufacturers selling non-essential drugs. Arguing that drug producers were making inordinately large profits on these products while allowing their retailers unremunerative margins, the AIOCD succeeded in spreading the boycott to Rajasthan, Gujarat, large parts of Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka and isolated pockets in north India.

Successful Start: The drug industry finally buckled last year, and representative associations of the manufacturers agreed to allow an 8 per cent wholesale margin and 18 per cent retail margin on all drugs classified under the Government's non-essential category IV. "Kishor Shah has had a taste of success now," said Sandoz Pharmaceuticals divisional chief Tarun Gupta, whose company had by end-December lost sales of over Rs 50 lakh in another of Shah's boycott actions, "so he feels he can do this to every company. There is no doubt that they have considerable clout, but if he thinks he can form a parallel government and dictate to us which products we should market and which we should not, then he is mistaken."

After the initial success against Sarabhai Chemicals, Shah conceived an elaborate system of retailer controls on industry to ensure that his constituents got a fair deal. Since prices of drugs in categories one to three are controlled, thus precluding enhanced margins on existing products, the AIOCD and RDCA decided that no manufacturer would be allowed to launch a new drug without obtaining a 'no objection certificate' (NOC) from the druggists associations. And the condition for grant of an NOC was that on price-controlled products, enhanced even margins of 18 per cent and 8 per cent must be given.

Other checks on manufacturers now include AIOCD guidelines on cancellation of dealerships and on manufacturer-dealer relationships as also a prospective standardisation of practices followed for defective or damaged goods and bottle breakages. Said Umedchand: "My idea is that we must establish the principle of a fair trade margin to traders, and we must control the arrogant practices of companies which have the leading brands. So with this in mind, we will also extend our fight to companies like Nestle, Lever and others."

The Sandoz boycott, typical of the "disciplinary" action being taken by Shah and Umedchand, began when Wander Pharmaceuticals, an associate company—both are owned by the multinational Sandoz—sacked three wholesalers who were unwilling to accept reduced margins on some drugs.

Stiff Stand: But soap and food products manufacturers, although they agree to a compromise hike in margins, are unlikely to yield as easily as the drugs industry to the 20 per cent demanded. Since many leading brands are already in stiff competition with lower-priced substitutes, it might be difficult to pass on the large price increases to consumers, and they insist that their companies cannot afford to absorb the hikes. A Hindustan Lever spokesman pointed out that the multinational's net profit amounted to only 8.5 per cent of its Rs 500 crore sales turnover, so a 10 per cent hike in margins would push the company into the red.

In anticipation of the impending boycott, soap manufacturers in Bombay have already come out with a strident protest to the Government against tobacco sellers, who had raised selling prices last October in a bid to gain fatter margins. And last fortnight, the Indian Soaps and Toiletries Manufacturers Association was drawing up strategies to counter Shah's threat.

Citing a Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission (MRTPC) judgement against Shah and his associates in the drug boycott cases—MRTPC Chairman, Justice S. Madhusudan Rao, ruled that boycotts against Sarabhai Chemicals, Glaxo and 55 other drug companies were unlawful—the sales director of a leading soap manufacturer pointed out that his association had already prepared various lines of defence if Shah should follow through with a boycott.

Lever and other soap manufacturers have also approached various consumer guidance societies in Bombay to help them market their products should the COTA threat materialise. At the same time, manufacturers are frantically chasing up governmental lobbies to bring political pressure to bear on Shah and Umedchand. Whatever the final outcome of the dealer boycotts, it promises to be a major battle for both manufacturers and retailers.

—CHANDER UDAY SINGH

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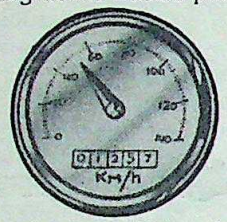
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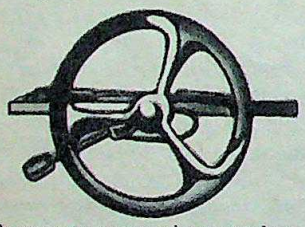
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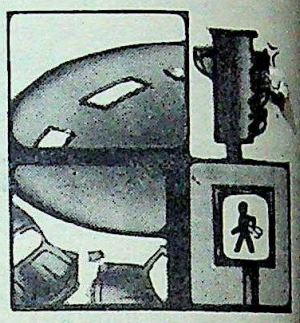
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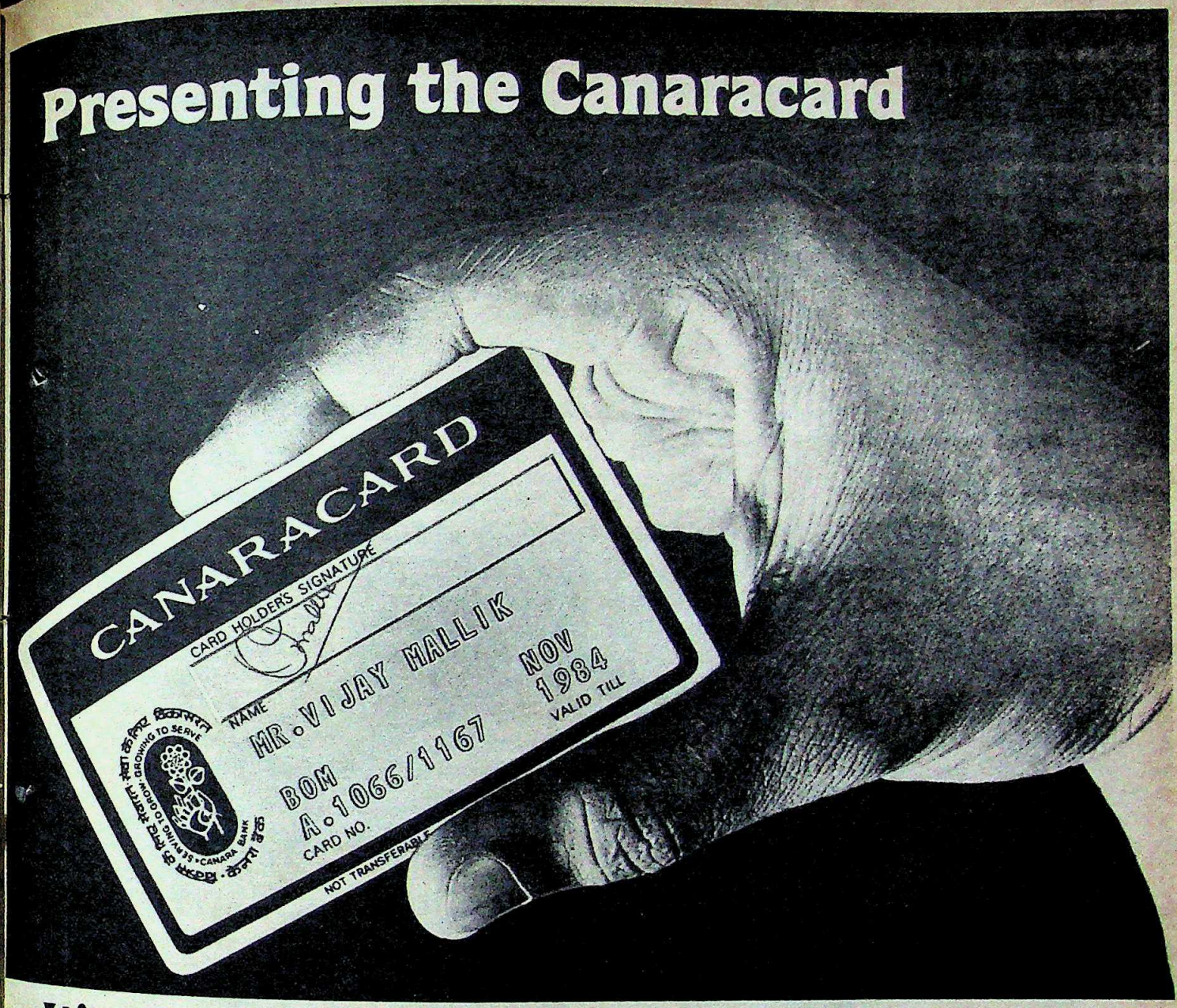
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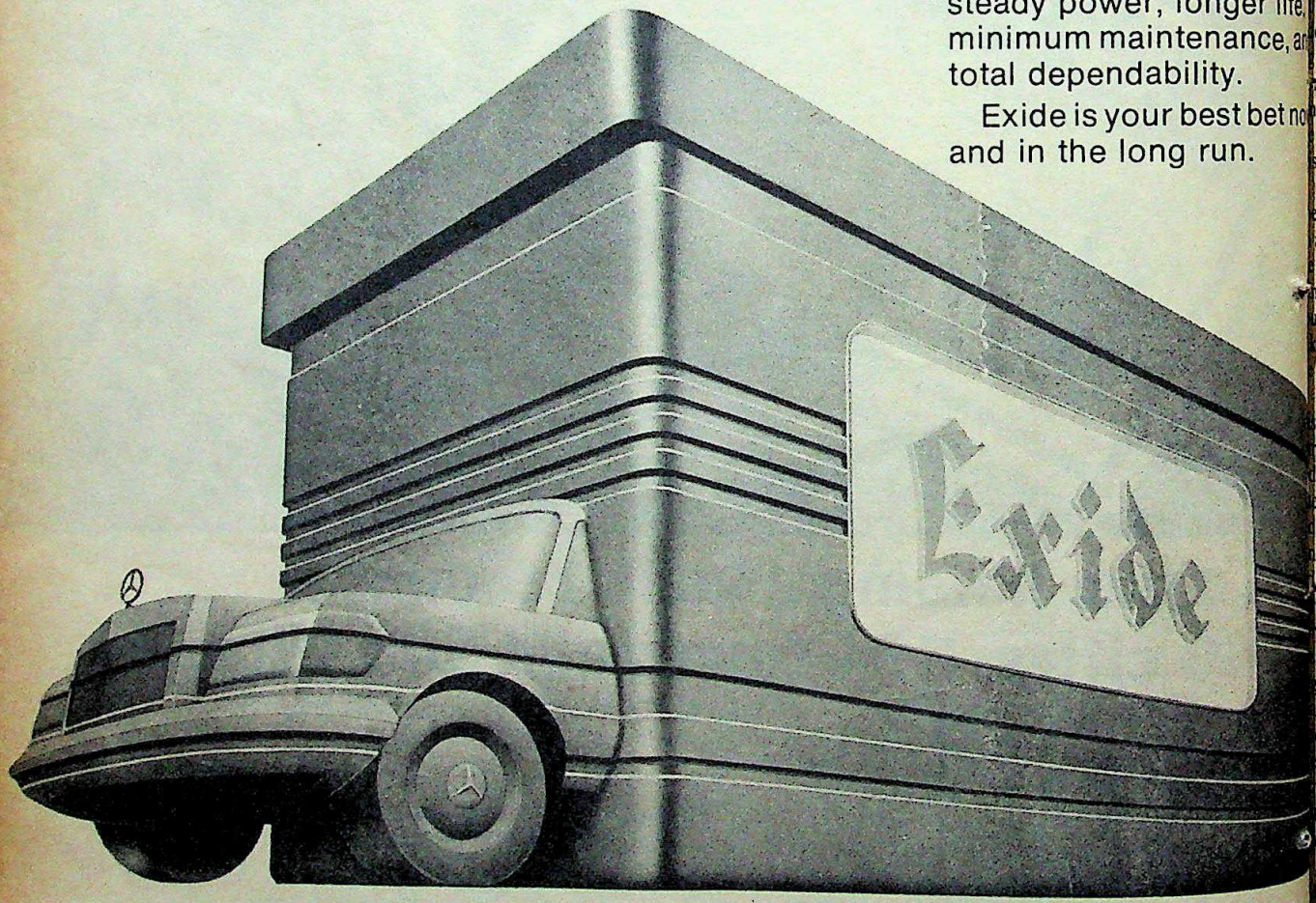
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DDB

A Flood of Criticism

N ANAND, Dr Verghese Kurien, the father of dairying in India, is holier than a cow. This was evident last fortnight as ew Delhi's Krishi Bhavan, the seat of the griculture Ministry, was suddenly jolted by e unprecedented mass resignation of early 700 scientists and officials of the ational Dairy Development Board (NDDB). was an unique form of protest against the overnment not denying allegations made a Bombay weekly dubbing "Operation ood" as a white lie.

The resignations came in the wake of a tement in the Rajya Sabha by Yogendra akwana, Union minister of state for agriture, saying that the Government had deed to set up a panel to evaluate the work- of NDDB and Indian Dairy Development rporation (IDC). The written reply to ata MP Sushil Mohunta also specified that evaluation would look into the issues sed by the weekly's article.

Interestingly, Makwana, who had at e time taken MP's from all over the country a tour of Anand to point out the fruits of white revolution, went beyond the requiment of the question while making his anncement. All that Mohunta had wanted know was whether the criticism levelled by article was genuine.

Frayed Tempers: Makwana's statement ed a hornets' nest in the picturesque NDDB mpus at Anand. Scientists and officials earlier asked NDDB Secretary, Dr R.P. eja, to call a meeting at the NDDB campus iscuss the article which ran down Opera- Flood. Tempers cooled only after Aneja that the offending article contained nuous inaccuracies. But Makwana's statent opened up fresh wounds. Younger proionals got together and in a series of meeilendra Kumar, deputy director of the eeds project: "We have left attractive rs with international organisations to ne and work in rural India. We are comed to a cause and cannot continue if the vernment mistrusts our aims."

A decision to resign was quickly taken. he beginning of last fortnight, even those king in villages had sent in their reations. Those at the campus signed an ressively drafted letter which said: "We joined the board because we believed were working for a far more important se and the satisfaction that millions of ers are benefiting. Many of us returned abroad or have left other research and fessional jobs which offered more remution. We worked with a shared commitment as the institution rewarded our initiative, welcomed our criticisms and allowed us freedom from bureaucratic obstacles. We leave with great sorrow to seek opportunities where we may work for the Indian farmer without fear or favour and where farmers and not irresponsible journalists judge our contribution."

Though everyone at NDDB like Kurien, Aneja and others agree that the Government has every right to go in for an evaluation they object however, to the fact that it was prompted by an "irresponsible, defamatory" article in a magazine. Pointed out Aneja: "In fact, it is high time that the Government did an evaluation so as to prove that the charges are baseless. But, is this the way to do it? We were not even asked to refute or agree with the charges." Added Dr A.A. Chothani, executive director of NDDB: "A steering committee comprising secretaries of agriculture, finance, expenditure, planning, and the NDDB chairman meet every two months to review the progress and constraints of implementation of Operation Flood II. They should have evaluated it long ago. The Government could have easily discussed it with them. We felt insulted that the Government was going to inquire into our work just because of a baseless report."

The resignations were handed over to Aneja on December 13. The next day Aneja handed all of them over to Kurien along with his own statement that he had no moral authority to accept the resignations. Kurien, however, refused to accept them saying that NDDB's work had been evaluated by Indian and foreign agencies and the results had made them proud. As the board has now got international recognition, its work should be continued, he said.

Criticism: Makwana's statement would not, in isolation, have evoked such a strong reaction—viewed by many as an overreaction. Operation Flood has after all been subjected to fierce criticism before. But it came with other developments. NDDB officials have not taken kindly to the Agriculture Ministry's decision of not extending the term of the NDDB headed by Kurien as chairman. The board's three-year term expired on September 14, 1982. For the first time, the Government wrote a "humiliating" letter asking the board to function till further orders.

And it is for the first time the board has been functioning on an ad hoc basis and this has caused a great degree of resentment. Aneja painfully points out: "It is like being on daily wages." NDDB sources feel that this is because Union Agriculture Minister Rao Birendra Singh, who does not see eye to eye with Kurien, is interested in recasting the board. The Agriculture Ministry is presently toying with the idea of having representatives of every state on the board. NDDB officials fear that this may lead to representatives pressurising the board in order to get projects and more money pumped into their state, and will result in national interests being sacrificed.



Dr Verghese Kurien: alleging a conspiracy

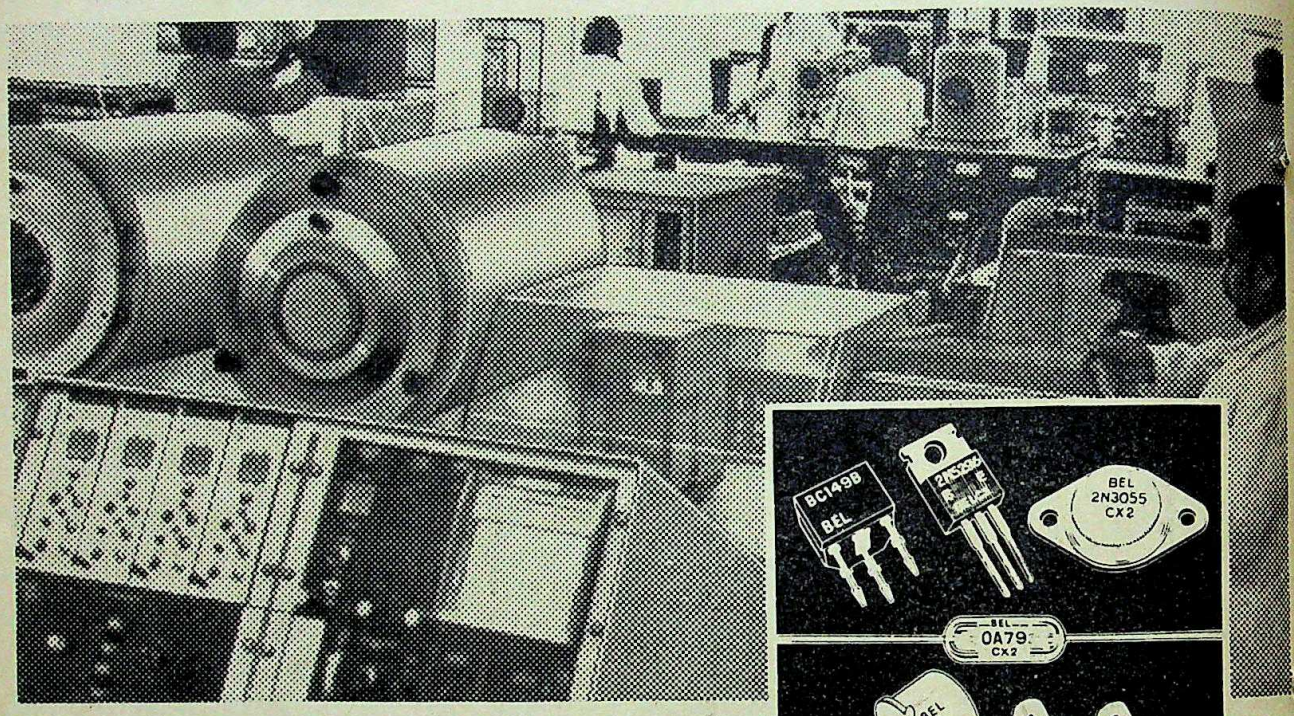
To add to the fracas, the Government has not given an extension to 55-year-old G.M. Jhala, managing director of IDC whose term expired in November '83. Though he has an excellent track record, he has now been asked to function for another three months, or till a successor is appointed. Both NDDB and IDC officials feel that the treatment meted out to Jhala was humiliating. When

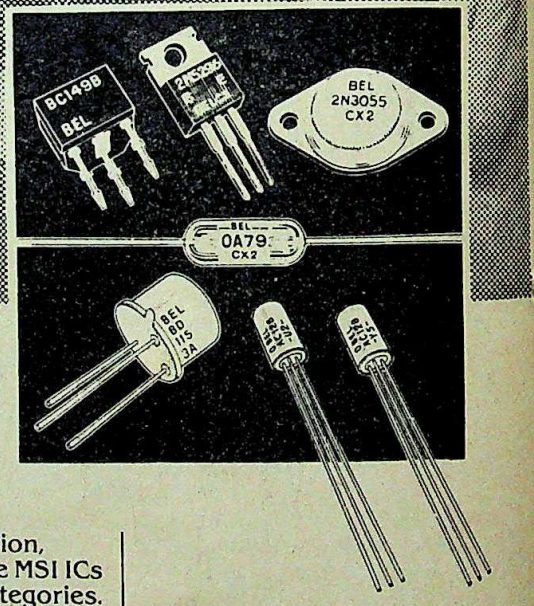
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How well a radio or a television set performs, depends on the quality of the components that go into it. Especially when it's something as critical as the semiconductor.

The semiconductor is as vital to an electronic circuit as the heart is to the circulation system. It is one of the most crucial components in all electronic circuits — from TV receivers to radar systems.

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...ia took over five years ago, the IDC's ...ing of Operation Flood was just Rs 10 ...re. The figure has now touched nearly Rs ...crore. Last year, the IDC amassed an all-...e high profit of Rs 12.77 crore.

WHILE the evaluation controversy has made Makwana and Singh extremely uncomfortable, Kurien d his team at Anand have repeatedly de-nded that the evaluation should also in-de in its terms of reference an inquiry to ntify the lobbies which are against Opera-n Flood. Said Chothani: "We have taken this criticism for too long. Now, it is the vernment's duty to find out who are the vested interests who are systematically ligning us." NDDB officials feel that the ted interests who have amassed huge for-es by exploiting farmers all these years lobbying against the activities of NDDB ch are no more confined to milk. Kurien ow trying—with varying degress of suc-—to organise groundnut cooperatives, on cooperatives, vegetable and fruit gro-s cooperatives and so on. Plans are on to n organise fishermen so that the middle-n's gains are negated.

Interestingly, copies of the Operation od article have found their way to all the rnational funding agencies of NDDB like Wrld Bank, FAO, UNDP, USAID and Ca-ian Aid. "It now seems to be that there is nspiracy," says Kurien adding that the people who are not against him seem to armers for whom he works. His own re-nse was to shoot off a detailed rebuttal to Government and if Makwana had seen before making his announcement he was iously not convinced.

Criticism of Operation Flood is nothing the project has been dogged by doubt-irtually ever since it was inaugurated in . Some of the criticism is obviously ed by organised lobbies who have been rsely affected by the new supplies of into cities; more telling are the com-nts raised by individuals and people who looked at its functioning and perfor-ce. Among the more pertinent points e against Operation Flood are:

It has encouraged dependence on im-s rather than made for self-sufficiency in production. In fact, although milk der imports have gone up from an avera-of 30,000 tonnes during the 1970s to 00 tonnes in 1982-83, they accounted for er cent of the milk production rather 20 per cent in the 1970s and more than r cent in the 1960s. In 1981-82, however, orts touched an all-time high of 77,773 es which NDDB officials say is due to low estic procurement of milk on account of ght and national calamities.

The programme has been progressively delayed. Far from eliminating imports in 1975, as was originally envisaged, these imports will now continue into the mid-'80s if not later. Kurien sees no particular virtue in self-sufficiency, pointing out that imports are now only of gifted milk powder and not on commercial terms.

► The programme has failed to provide adequate inputs to farmers to increase production and while milk production hasn't increased much, Operation Flood has diverted available milk from rural areas to cities. In fact, milk procurement has risen to 62 lakh litres a day in 1982-83 from less than 10 lakh litres in 1970—much faster than milk production which has risen to 34.6 million tonnes from around 20 million tonnes. NDDB officials hotly dispute the contention that farmers are doing without milk for their children on account of the programme. In a confidential point by point rebuttal of the weekly's article, NDDB argues that independent studies have shown per capita protein and energy consumption to be higher in households owning milch cattle than others, and that by getting a good price for milk, the programme has made it possible for farmers to rear good quality animals with a higher productivity and income levels.

► The programme has succeeded well in Gujarat with its rich dairy and cooperative traditions but has not made much headway in its transplants in other parts of the country. NDDB argues that Gujarat has not been favoured at the expense of other parts of the country and that of 25,000 cooperative societies in the country, only 7,000 are in Gujarat.

The weekly's article also raises a plethora of detail on which it disputes the success of Operation Flood, which the NDDB has sought to refute in an equally detailed manner. And though, both sides—Operation Flood and its critics—can muster reams of evidence, their views are sprinkled with value judgements and arguments, and assessments are far from conclusive. Both sides have been able to present persuasive arguments, and the flood of controversy is unlikely to roll back in a hurry.

Wrong Move: After the controversy kicked up by Makwana's statement flared up, both Makwana and Singh repeatedly put their foot into their mouth. Makwana in the Rajya Sabha called Operation Flood a grand success and Singh beat a retreat saying that the evaluation was only to assess the achievements of the programme and to improve its implementation by suggesting measures to remove any shortcomings. This evaluation, he claimed, was decided on much before the article appeared. On December 22, Singh once again told a parliament committee that the Government was very keen on expanding the successful Operation Flood programme.

However, tempers at NDDB and the IDC head office at Baroda are yet to cool down. Meanwhile, IDC officials who belong to a government body, unlike the NDDB which is an autonomous one, have also resigned *en masse*. About 50 of them have tendered their resignations in protest against the Government's attitude. Said Z.S. Chhatwal, head coordination, IDC: "The Government should have consulted the IDC and then decided on a course of action. We are not afraid of any evaluation, but the Government has distrusted our faith and commitment."

For stalwarts like Kurien, the Government's loss of faith has only strengthened his resolve. At 62, he still has a lot of fight in him and has weathered much criticism in his controversial career. Says he angrily: "We will not give up so easily. These are subtle ways to neutralise us, break up a team of dedicated professionals and meet political ends."

—RAMESH MENON

THE MARKETS

Buzzing Along

STOCK-MARKETS often behave like bumble-bees. An insect as awkwardly put together as a bumble-bee cannot fly—according to the laws of aerodynamics anyway—but the bee doesn't know aerodynamics and off it goes. Similarly, stock exchanges don't know the first thing about economics but they seem to go on and do fairly well even when the economy doesn't.

But for the bumper harvest there were hardly any plus points in the way the economy has fared through 1983. Industrial production has faltered and when the chips are down it may have done no better than an odd decimal point. Exports are barely up and foreign exchange reserves substantially down despite IMF and other loans. But the markets seem to have taken all this in their stride and still kept their heads above water. *The Economic Times* index improved 16 per cent over the year, not a bad feat considering that most other indices, except prices, were just about marginally up.

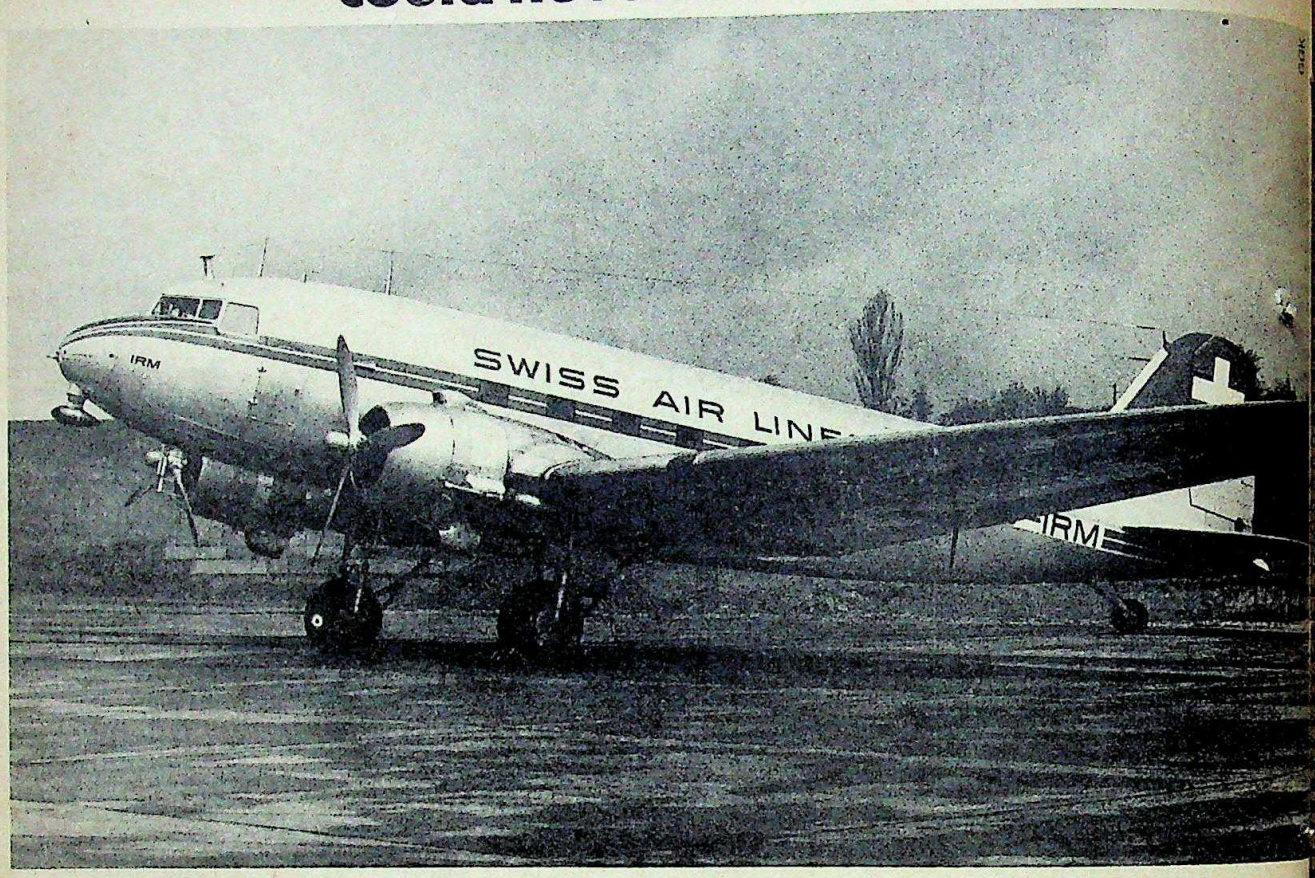
But stock-markets have their own logic and are busy doing their own thing. In Europe and the United States, stock-market indices are breaking one record after another though their economies continue to be in the dumps. There are several reasons why this is so, none or few of them applicable to India. Companies that have survived the recession are obviously made of sterner stuff and their share prices show it. In India very few companies have gone under—the recession was a marginal affair and did not really affect many companies—and with prices once again rising, they are now back in the running.

Two factors seem to have helped

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Why Captain Schneeberger's boyhood dream could never be fulfilled.



When Captain Schneeberger looked longingly at the cockpit of the DC-3, he was a bright boy of 10. That was in 1950.

When Captain Schneeberger climbs into his cockpit today, it's the cockpit of a DC-9-81. And the DC-3 has long since travelled to a museum.

However, that's the way it is: aircraft themselves are certainly fast, but so is the speed at which they develop. And Swissair isn't entirely uninvolved in their development, either.

For example, the B-747-357: this largest of all Jumbos is the result of a long list of special requests by Swissair and was built in close co-operation with Boeing. It was designed entirely in accordance with Swissair's principle of offering passengers a maximum amount of space and not carrying a maximum number of passengers. And that applies not only in the First Class but also in the Swiss Class, where there are 9 seats per row instead of the usual 10.

Or the DC-10-30: we were the first airline in the world to have it converted into the ER (extended range) version with extra tanks. This enables us, for example, to fly non-stop between Switzerland and Bombay or Colombo or Rio de Janeiro. And we've fitted its First Class compartment – like that of the B-747 – with Slumberettes, seats which are adjustable at the push of a button and on which you can stretch out full length.

Or the DC-9-81: thanks to several special requests by Swissair, this has become one of the most comfortable of all short-haul aircraft. We have five instead of six seats per row, the air-conditioning, insulation and pressure equalization are even more effective, and elegant leather seats give the First Class an even greater degree of comfort.

Or the A310 Airbus: it offers wide-body comfort on short- and medium-haul routes and has the most functional cockpit a pilot can find in a passenger aircraft. And even those who don't fly in it can benefit from its advanced technology: the Swissair A310 Airbus is even quieter than is required by the most stringent noise regulations.

Or the A310-320 we've ordered this advanced version of today's Airbus has a much bigger tank capacity which will make it into a standard medium-haul aircraft with increased range.

And the progress is continuing we're already co-operating with the manufacturers on plans for even more efficient, more comfortable and environmentally more beneficial aircraft which are due to start entering service at the end of the eighties.

But one thing still remains the same today as it was 33 years ago the way the boys gaze after our aircraft as they take off from Zurich or Geneva for one of the 99 destinations dotted around the world and the dreams which they dream as they do so.

And which – as far as the aircraft are concerned – will no doubt have to remain dreams for ever.

swissair

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ACTIVE STOCKS

	High 1983	Low 19.12.83	Close	Change on Fortnight
Aimbic Chemicals	147.50	120.00	125.00	(17.50)
Ashok Leyland	37.65	29.50	33.00	0.20
Asian Paints	46.00	29.00	44.00	(1.00)
Associated Cement	461.50	325.00	389.00	(7.00)
Atlas Copco	36.50	25.00	35.50	(0.50)
Bajaj Auto	1,800.00	990.00	1,680.00	92.00
Balharpur	48.00	37.40	47.50	0.25
Baroda Rayon	312.00	210.00	251.00	(1.00)
Birla India	33.50	18.05	33.50	1.40
Birla Jute	62.20	46.10	58.40	(1.70)
Bow Plast	74.50	38.00	46.50	nil
Bombay Dyeing	96.00	57.50	62.00	(0.50)
Britannia Industries	40.25	23.75	40.25	7.00
Brooke Bond	37.20	26.00	37.10	2.60
Ceat Tyres	285.00	195.00	262.50	(2.50)
Century Spinning	890.00	695.00	842.50	(10.00)
Chloride India	67.65	45.00	47.25	1.00
Cotties of India	27.87	21.50	27.81	0.06
Colgate	99.00	84.00	98.00	1.00
Cyanamid	33.00	23.00	32.50	0.50
DCM	105.50	32.31	75.00	(0.25)
Dunlop India	28.40	20.00	26.40	0.10
East India Hotels	33.50	20.00	33.00	3.00
Escon Engineering	38.00	29.00	38.00	2.00
Escorts	82.87	39.75	79.50	10.31
Fluid Specialities	91.50	50.50	70.00	(1.50)
Foxo	31.50	20.00	24.50	0.75
Gia Carbon	29.00	17.00	26.00	2.50
Guest Keen Williams	23.00	18.00	22.10	0.40
Gwalior Rayon	55.75	44.00	54.00	2.00
Hindustan Aluminium	48.00	32.10	47.80	1.50
Hindustan Lever	71.50	48.58	52.00	2.50
Hindustan Motors	39.30	26.40	39.30	1.06
Indian Aluminium	25.25	16.25	25.10	0.25
Indian Explosives	28.00	22.00	28.00	nil
Indian Organic	35.00	25.50	33.25	4.00
Indian Rayon	86.00	62.50	71.00	3.50
ITC	44.85	31.50	34.00	nil
Jayshree Tea	44.25	20.35	44.20	1.45
J.K. Synthetics	57.50	32.00	46.00	(0.80)
Jyoti Vaporator	93.00	70.00	92.50	(0.50)
Kilburn	68.10	55.80	60.00	(1.10)
Kinetic Engineering	163.00	68.00	135.00	9.00
Kothari Oil	28.25	13.25	28.00	(0.25)
Kothari (Madras)	29.00	16.25	29.00	3.75
Larsen & Toubro	77.00	52.00	77.00	8.00
Lyka	31.80	14.00	31.80	1.10
Lyka Machines	90.00	40.00	78.00	(9.00)
Madura Coats	23.40	15.30	23.40	0.90
Mahindra & Mahindra	66.00	42.00	58.00	(1.00)
Malayali Rubber	35.37	22.69	28.50	2.00
Mangalam Industries	292.50	220.00	245.00	11.25
Mangalore Cement	62.50	36.00	62.50	4.50
Mangalore Organic	207.50	156.25	182.50	15.00
Mysore Paper	51.90	40.20	51.40	(0.40)
Mysore Auto	276.00	229.00	251.00	7.00
Nahaxy	50.00	36.00	48.50	3.00
Naimood Woollen	65.00	36.50	64.00	3.50
Nocil	183.00	100.00	113.50	6.50
Nuddington Rand	40.75	19.00	40.25	0.75
Orkay Wallace	48.75	22.20	46.75	(0.05)
Orient Fibres	41.50	21.75	35.00	0.38
Orkay	30.81	15.25	30.81	4.56
Orient Products	54.10	38.30	54.00	0.25
Orissa Chemicals	67.00	49.50	56.75	(0.25)
Orissa Steel	322.50	234.50	256.00	17.00
Oswal	455.00	390.00	396.00	3.00
Oswal Investments	59.00	38.00	53.00	(1.00)
Pacific Carbide	20.50	16.00	20.50	1.50
Parry Martin Black	27.70	21.50	25.60	(2.00)
Parry's	26.50	22.00	22.75	(0.25)
Pearl Agro	405.00	262.00	405.00	42.00
Pearl Trust	40.50	22.40	40.30	nil
Peico	14.10	12.25	13.50	nil

the mini-boom on its course. First, there was the non-resident influx which lifted prices not only of DCM and Escorts but a large number of other companies as well. Non-residents not only invest on their own but also remit money to their friends and relations here who then proceed to make investments as residents. According to a source, something like Rs 100 crore, if not more, has found its way into the share market in this way. The second factor is the massive diversification programme most companies seem to be engaged in. There is hardly a company that is not expanding or diversifying and when you add up all the programmes the impact on the market must be considerable. Ultimately it all adds up and you see the indices ticking all the time as the index edges upward from one record to another.

Only two groups have not done well, cotton textiles and steel. Cotton textiles is a perennial loser but the depression in steel is something of a mystery. It is possible that the days of steel are over and the economy is moving on to other core metals and materials. The state-owned Steel Authority of India is said to be losing money at the rate of Rs 1 crore a day—per day, not per month—which means it is losing more in a year than the entire equity of Tata Steel. Tata Steel has not done too well and it is doubtful whether it will do any better next year either.

Buoyant Sectors: The group that has really done well is plantations but that is a fluke, for you can't really expect tea prices to remain at such a high level for all time to come. It is surprising that cement has not done as well as it should have; perhaps the fact that there will be too much cement in the market very soon has induced second thoughts. Next to plantations, engineering companies are apparently riding high, almost certainly as a result of the massive modernisation and diversification programme currently in hand in nearly all the sectors. They should do even better next year when some of the programmes now in the pipeline will reach their peak.

There is no reason why 1984 should not be as good as, if not better than, 1983 but there is apparently no ointment without a fly. Mrs Gandhi has said that mid-term elections are just not on, and are a figment of the Opposition's imagination. But what if they are held, imagination or no imagination, and what if they create an upset or, worse, a stalemate? Politics is the stuff stock-markets thrive on and a sudden mid-term poll followed by a stalemate can drive the best markets into a corner. But this is not the first time the stock-markets will have to come to terms with political goings-on but they know what to do. The history of 1977 may repeat itself but a market that lived through 1977 can also live through 1984.

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

Country	Unit & Currency	TT Selling Rates (Rs)	Buying Rates (Rs)
Australia	1 As $	9.3290	9.2009
Austria	100 As Sch.	54.5750	54.0643
Bahrain	1 Dinar	26.1756	27.9208
Bangladesh	100 Taka	41.9327	41.6300
Canada	1 Can $	8.5037	8.4237
Denmark	1 D Kr	1.0483	1.0605
Egypt	1 Egp £	12.5042	12.4218
France	1 Fr Frc	1.2658	1.2360
Hong Kong	1 Hk	1.3650	1.3523
Indonesia	100 Rupiah	1.0470	1.0417
Iran	100 Rial	11.9782	11.8877
Italy	100 Lt Lira	0.6331	0.6273
Japan	100 Jap Yen	4.5454	4.4247
Kenya	1 K. shilling	0.7592	0.7530
Kuwait	1 Dinar	36.2607	35.9173
Malaysia	1 Ml $	4.5405	4.4979
Mauritious	1 Rupee	0.8197	0.8232
Nepal	1 Rupee	0.6978	0.6928
Netherlands	1 D Glds	3.4210	3.3882
Pakistan	1 Rupee	0.8033	0.7765
Singapore	1 Sing$	4.9826	4.9352
Spain	100 Sp Pt	6.7058	6.6418
Sri Lanka	1 Rupee	0.4303	0.4211
Sweden	1 Sw Kr	1.3125	1.2996
Switzerland	1 Sw Frc	4.8216	4.7767
Tanzania	1 T. Sch	0.8335	0.8394
Thailand	100 Baht	46.3467	45.9963
UK	1 Pound	15.0627	14.9488
USA	1 US $	10.6175	10.5175
UAE	1 Dihram	2.8316	2.8108
USSR	1 Rouble	13.3737	13.4640
W. Germany	1 DM	3.8461	3.7593

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Ltd., New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 12 December '83.

ECONOMIC TRENDS

	Latest	Change on month
PRICES		
ET Commodity Price Index*		
December 20, 1983	282.6	5.1
Cereals	252.2	1.0
Chemicals	339.2	1.2
Industrial Fibres	190.6	5.6
Metals	373.6	1.1
Sugar	204.3	3 5
Textile Yarn	222.8	1.5
Vegetable Oils	363.1	11.1
Gold, standard, December 20, 1983 (Rs per 10 gm)	1,845.00	(15.00)
Silver, .999 December 20, 1983 (Rs per kg)	3,530.00	(30.00)
SHARES		
ET Share Price Index* December 19, 1983	284.9	13.7
Cement	270.6	1.5
Chemicals	218.7	5.7
Engineering	517.0	40.7
Fertilisers	255.0	19.1
Man-made Fibres	422.6	4.8
Paper	547.9	6.6
Rubber Goods	212.9	34.2
MONEY	(per cent)	
Money Supply, November 25, 1983	1.8	
Bank Deposits	1.8	
Foreign Exchange Assets	(10.5)	

* 1969–70 = 100

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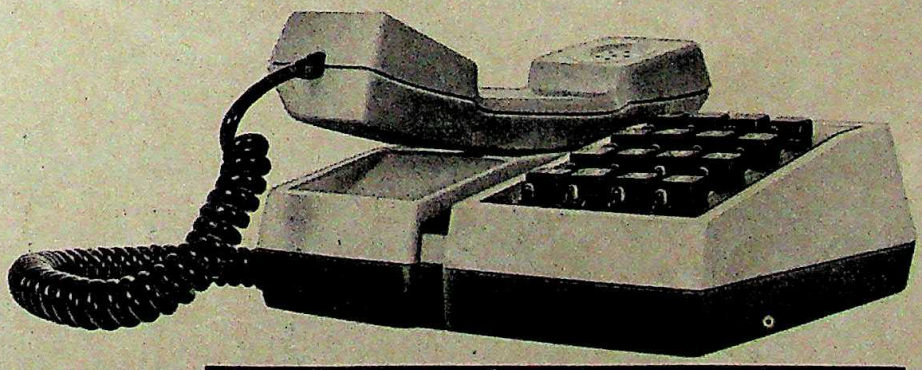
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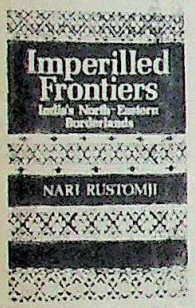
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Changing Times

IMPERILLED FRONTIERS
INDIA'S NORTH-EASTERN BORDERLANDS
by NARI RUSTOMJI
Oxford University Press
Price: Rs 80; Pages: 158



FOR THE budding bureaucrat there is no field more frustrating than the north-east, and yet none so rewarding. Unfortunately, the frustrations began to be appreciated only with the departure of the British. Being posted to one of the north-eastern states seemed a calamity to the young IAS or IPS officer; the attitude was in sharp contrast to that of his British predecessor. The shrewd tribal was quick to see the difference. Dislike bred distrust and created many of the problems that afflict this hapless part of the country.

Nari Rustomji's observations must be viewed in this perspective. He was, it must be said, an honourable exception. After his appointment to the ICS in 1941 he 'lived life king-size'—to borrow an expression from the cigarette ads—scouring the north-eastern borderlands in a career spanning over three decades, like no Indian had ever done. In three tenures, he was advisor on tribal areas to the governor (who acted "in his personal discretion") while dealing with regions like the excluded Naga Hills district and the erstwhile North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA); he was Assam's commissioner for hills, chief secretary of Meghalaya and had even more colourful spells as the prime minister of Sikkim and advisor to the King of Bhutan. His third volume, therefore, is born out of this rich experience.

Hastening Slowly: The book differs from earlier ones in the sense that it is less of history and more of analysis: an analysis of what went wrong with undoubtedly noble intentions for the upliftment of the north-eastern tribals. It is an engrossing account of the incipient stages of Naga insurgency and the gradual alienation of the hill tribes from the Assamese elite. It is also a fascinating tale of the problems that planners overcame while engaged in the long-term development of Arunachal Pradesh.

Quite understandably, it is a strong defence of the concept of "hastening slowly", for which Rustomji fought throughout his career, and which he finally managed to implement in NEFA, along with his alter-ego Verrier Elwin, the self-trained anthropologist whom he calls NEFA's "administering herald angel".

Interestingly, the book has appeared at a time when the Elwin doctrine of slow, controlled development is being questioned within Arunachal Pradesh, administered over two decades on the basis of Elwin's 'museum piece' approach. Says Rustomji: "Verrier enjoyed no statutory powers, but his influence and inspiration permeated the entire administrative fabric. His critics objected that he was advocating the isolation of the tribes and thus retarding their integration with the rest of the country. But they hesitated to attack him beyond a point, knowing that he was held in deep regard by Nehru. His advice therefore carried the highest sanction and was respectfully heeded."

Do-gooders: Rustomji analyses the Elwin approach in the background of the Mizo and Naga problems which he blames on too hasty a pace of development. In spite of giving the tribals education and medical care, the missionary inevitably interfered with their life-style. For example, in the Naga Hills, the evening community feasts were condemned as drinking sessions and replaced with psalm-reading. The British forbade head-hunting. While the Nagas were still absorbing this, came the over-zealous Indian administrators, rearing to reform "these tribals". Natural human resistance did the rest, Rustomji feels, and quotes the example of the Pune population's revolt against the Rajneesh Ashram.

The pace of development in the tribal areas thus had to be adjusted to the isolated communities' ability to absorb change. This is the crux of the Verrier Elwin philosophy which the author has backed throughout his eventful career. He pleads: "It will not be the end of the world if processes of change are geared to a steadier and more relaxed pace. It may well be the end of the tribes if they are not."

Apportioning Blame: So far, so good. While Rustomji can justly claim credit—he does it with extreme humility—for the experiment in development, it is time now, 12 years after the creation of the Union territory of Arunachal Pradesh, to assess its progress in the light of recent happenings. Rustomji attributes the detribalisation and corruption of the central Indian tribals to their coming in contact too rapidly with self-seeking plainsmen. And the Mizos and Nagas got corrupted by the independent Indian Government's misplaced strategy of allocating funds disproportionate to their needs without seeking to account for t

But how does one explain the rap with which the fledgling Union territor joined the 'mainstream of national life' decade? It has spawned the same 'cont rocracy' which is the bane of Manipur Nagaland. The young Arunachali polit has taken no time to learn the art of wh le defection, and can claim a polity no ner than that of neighbouring Naga even if it has not yet matched the dete tion in Manipur.

It may be that the Elwin-Rustom proach needed men like them for eff perpetuation. But, in retrospect, could they have ultimately prevented Arun Pradesh's graduation to 'parliamentar mocracy'? The few young and educate nachali tribals had seen the world and to wonder why their kinsmen were kept as glorified show-pieces. In sho the approach have an in-built limitatio being able to put off the inevitabl change? The Arunachali young men l the more 'developed' Mizos, Naga Khasis today and, in the absence of re ble explanation, blame Verrier Elwin a Government.

Chauvinism: Rustomji is once a target when he talks of "Assamese ch ism" which, he rightly says, cost them districts. The Assamese plainsm always in a rush to govern the tribe impose on them their language and c The author describes the change in As attitudes that came about as the lea passed from a liberal, pragmatic Go Bordoloi, the state's first chief minis Bishnuram Medhi, "shrewd, narro ded and parochially Assamese". He q number of instances to prove his thesis was "Assamese chauvinism, iro enough, that diminished Assam and h her tribal population".

Later, describing the formation o halaya—the unkindest cut of all as fa Assamese were concerned—he say Khasis were reconciled to the pros coexistence with them (the Assames single state; but as they felt the As embrace tightening, they too decide must extricate themselves before it late." This should set the Assamese thinking, threatened as he is today progressive alienation of his very ow tribals.

Here is a valuable book fr acknowledged authority on an un region that should set many others ring too, most of all the lesser mortals administrative services who prefer to north-east by remote control from rather than rough it out in the coun *à la* Rustomji.

—SHEKHAR

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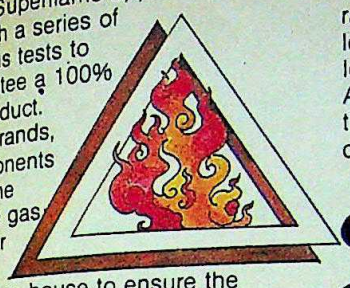
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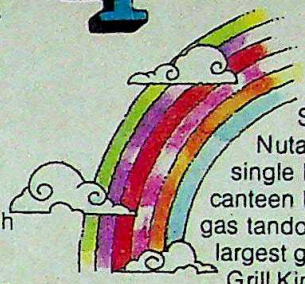
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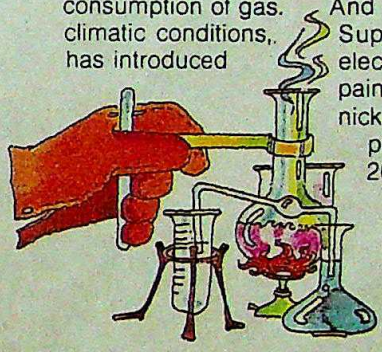
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Inventions that changed the world-I

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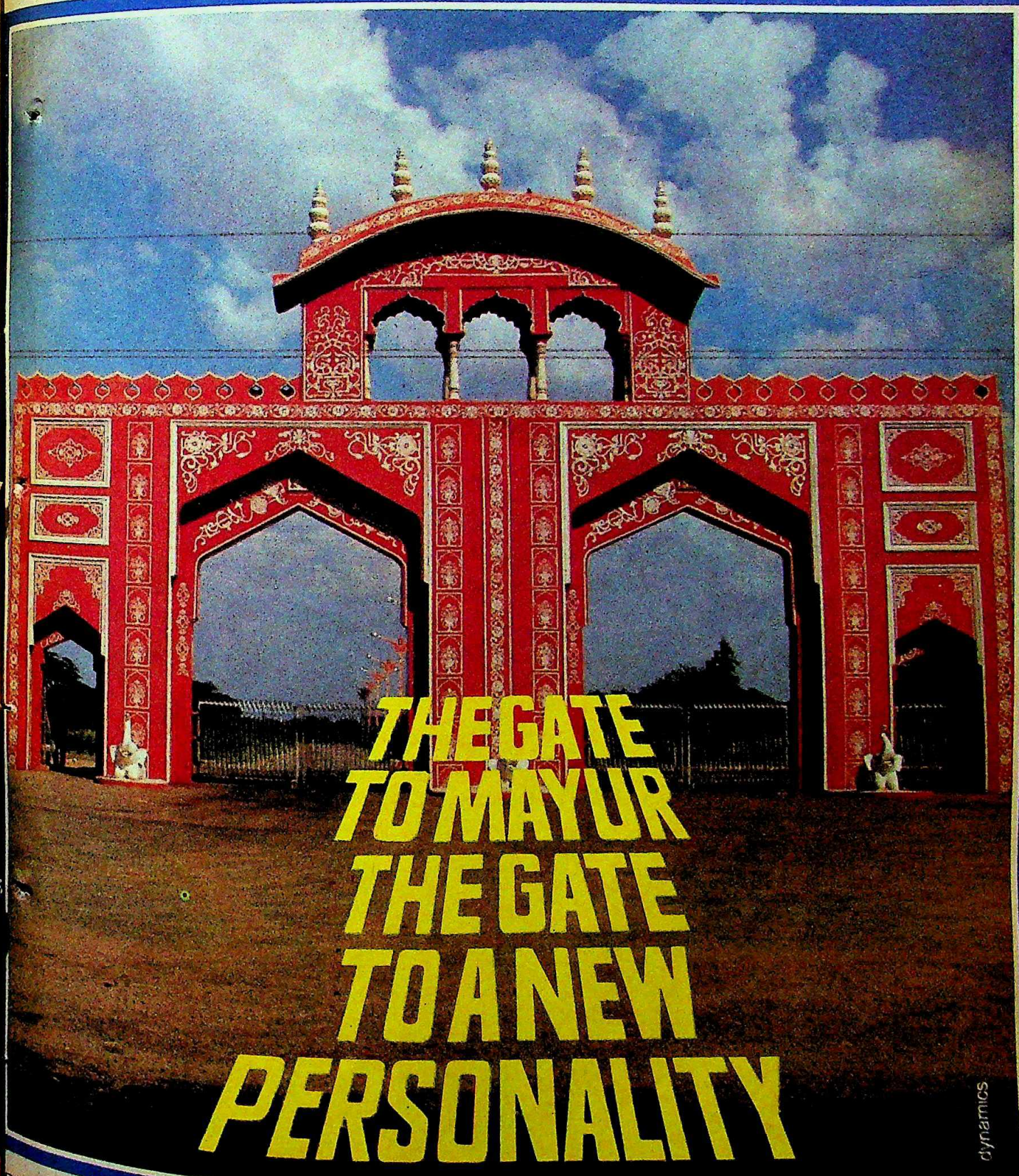
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CKET

ailing the Tests



RIGHT across the spectrum of Indian society, the defeat by the West Indies has been viewed as a national catastrophe, much as another defeat was in Hungary in the 1950s, when their football m was beaten in the World Cup.

There is consternation among the larger s of the public because it is unable to ncile the Test defeats with the winning of World Cup. They fail to appreciate that t cricket and the limited-overs version are ost different games. Except in the ance of highly talented natural cricketers the West Indians, proficiency in one-day ket is detrimental to the techniques requi- for the playing of Test cricket.

To be brutally frank, India's winning World Cup was a colossal fluke. I would ure to add that rather than spur the e's advancement in this country, it has ed a set-back in that it has vulgarised the e and mentality of the average.

So strong are my feelings about one-day ket, that I would recommend the stam- statutory warnings on cricket bats balls reading: "Limited-overs cricket be injurious to your technique" and ted-overs cricket can make you a medium-paced non-wicket-taking hack". It can only be accepted in small doses as a necessary evil that produces finance.

Predictable Debacle: The Test series against the West Indies was more one-sided than expected but the result was not against form, for the West Indies were always the better side. With Desmond Haynes and Larry Gomes failing to find their best form, the tourists did not bat to their full potential. But they bowled remarkably well and none better than Michael Holding who was considered a waning force at the start of the tour.

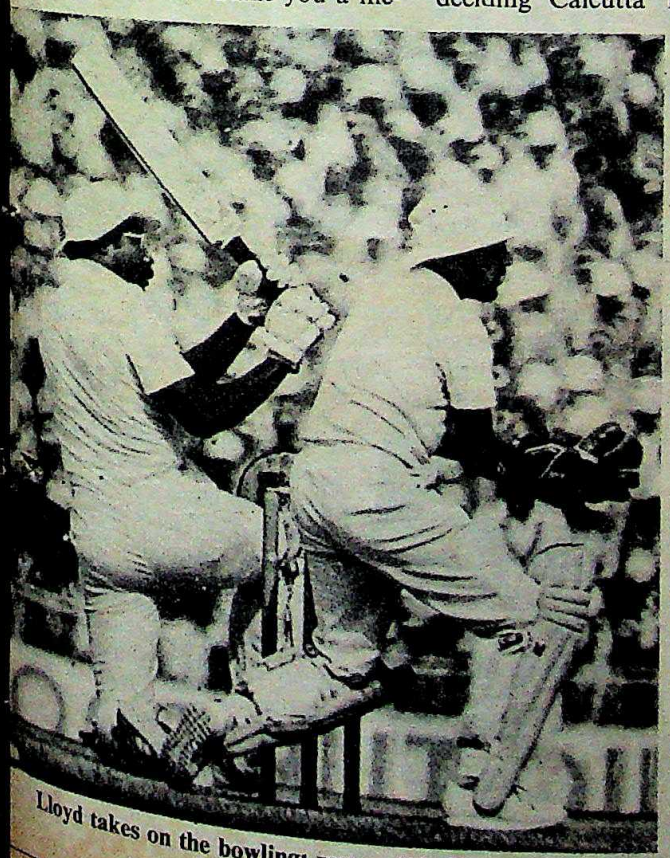
The Indian performance in the Test series should be judged against the background of the series in the West Indies earlier in the year and not against achievement in the World Cup. Defeat came not because things went seriously wrong with the team as is generally made out but because of the intrinsic deficiencies of Indian cricket, of which the most obvious is the flabby, ignorant, corrupt and callous parent body.

Team spirit and discipline are closely linked and in this sphere the elder statesman of the dressing-room, Sunil Gavaskar, has much to answer for. His new flamboyant approach to batting and the manner in which he got out in the second innings of the series-deciding Calcutta Test could only have bewildered and depressed his team-mates.

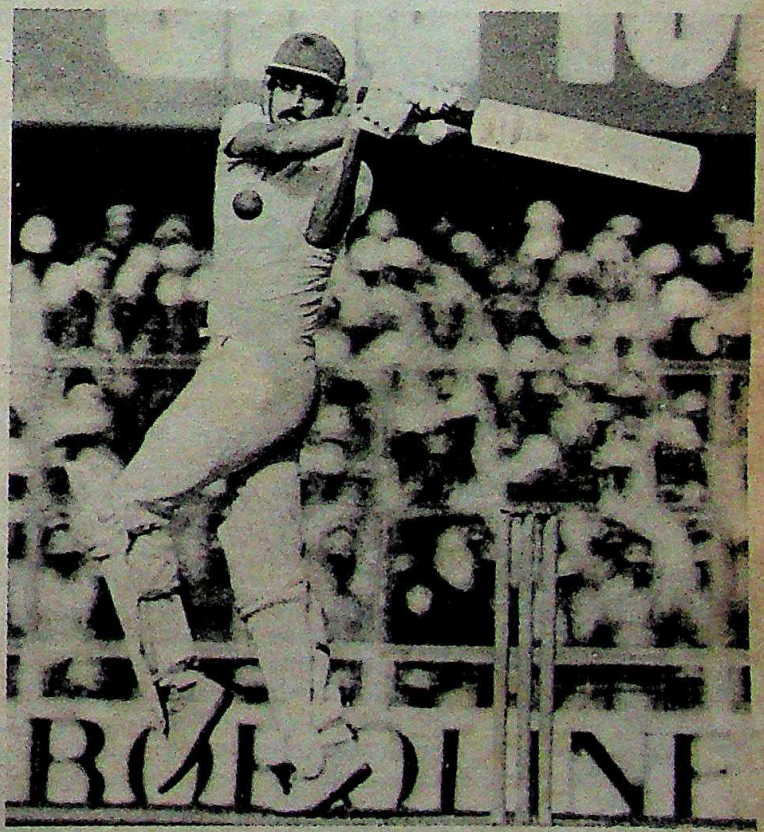
Irresponsible Batting: It was the suicidal stroke with which Gavaskar got out that roused the suspicion that the interests of the side mattered less to some than to others and I fully expected the selectors to make an example of Gavaskar by leaving him out of the side for the Madras Test. For the second time in three innings, Gavaskar had virtually thrown away his wicket and the fact that he got away without so much as a reprimand, reflects poorly on the authority of his captain and the five men on the selection committee.

In an interview with M.A.K. Pataudi during the Test at Bombay, Gavaskar said that he bats the way he does now because he has come to a stage where he wants to enjoy his cricket. That is tantamount to my barging into the editor's office, tap-dancing on his desk and then trying to justify my conduct by saying that after 30 years of hard slog, I now want to enjoy my journalism. Gavaskar's attitude was in sharp contrast with the dedicated manner in which Clive Lloyd later applied himself to restoring the fortunes of his side in that very same match.

The trouble is that over the years, the board has made Gavaskar feel indispensable, condoning several misdemeanours and indulging his every whim. More advantage could have been gained from reminding Mr Gavaskar that two of the most notable victories in India's Test history were gained in his absence, at Calcutta and Madras, against the 1974-75 West Indian side.



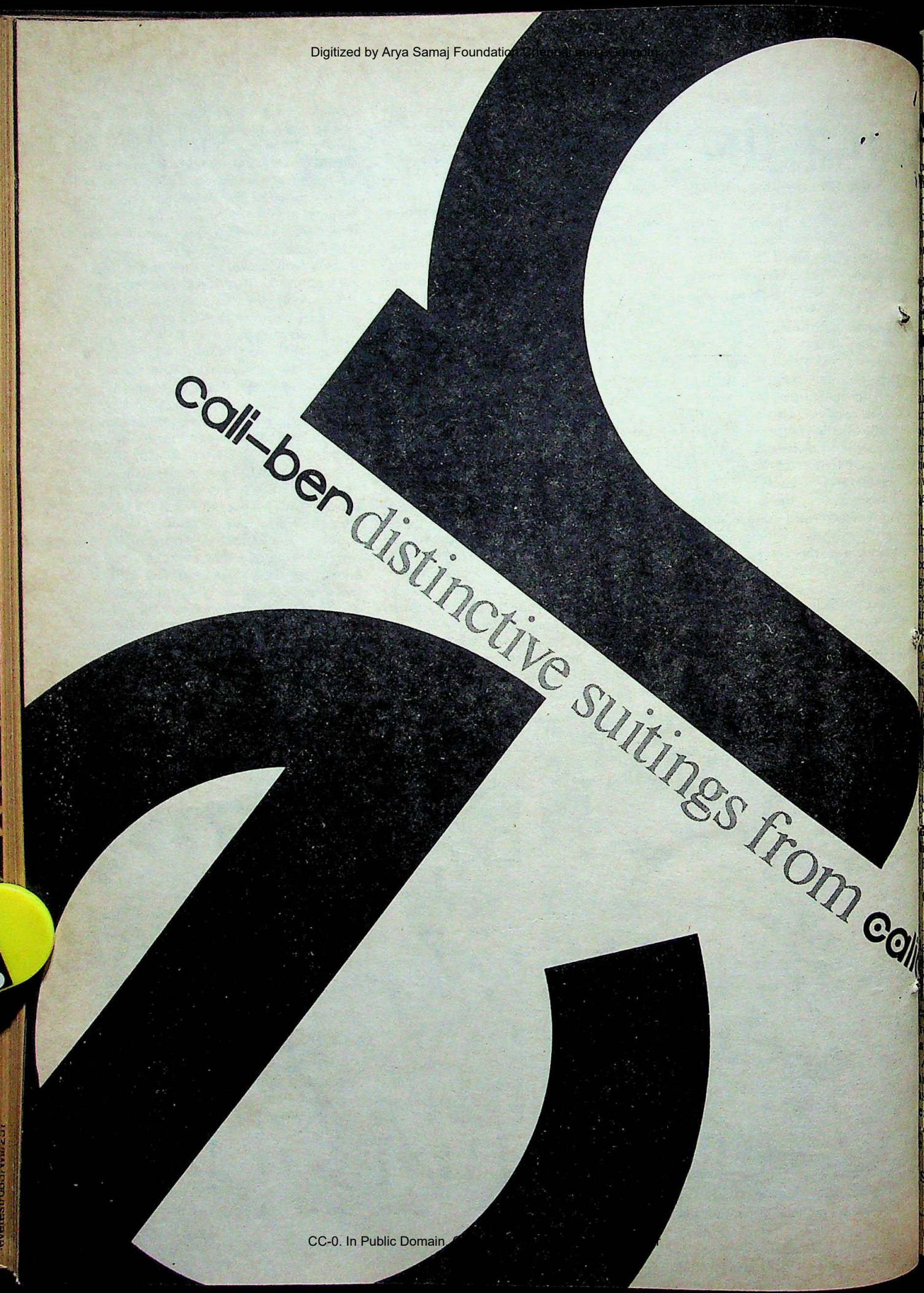
Lloyd takes on the bowling: responsible leadership



Kapil Dev lashes out: fundamental errors

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EAM's manager has a large part to play in spreading harmony and creating discipline. But the office of nager has been rendered farcical by the appointing a different individual for Test. The managers had nothing more ffer than arrangements for the team's sportation and performing minor es.

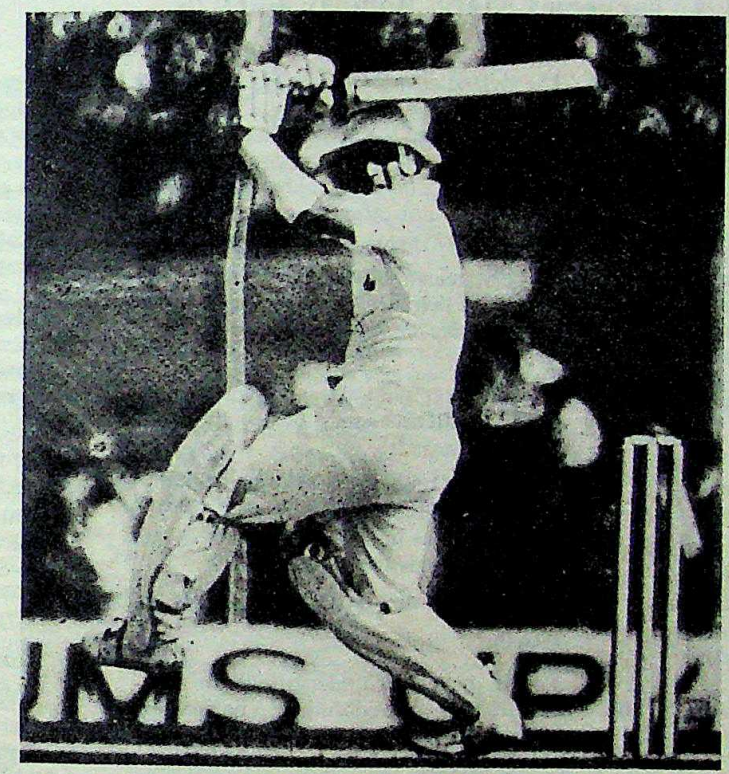
The system of changing managers was ded to reward former cricketers bela- for their services. Yet its strongest cri- ave been the managers them- who said they could do no to their post in these cir- stances. Despite the obvious tcomings of this policy, the d has announced that a nge cannot be made for at least her three years. When the bers of the board are so preoc- ed with self-perpetuation, is it wonder that Indian cricket has e to its present state?

Without the counsel of an lished manager, Kapil Dev d the bridge of his ship a lonely e. Except for a couple of in- s, Kapil Dev the batsman d right through the two series nst Pakistan and the West s. But he scaled new heights as wler and for both work-load as a measure of success, he led de by example.

Field Mistakes: Nobody d credit Kapil with being an captain. In fact he made very fundamental errors in ging his bowlers. Apart from fact that it is more ult to captain on the field than from the 's chair, he is due some sympathy for the tions imposed on him by inadequate ng resources. In his circumstances, it far easier to make the wrong decision the right one.

One of Kapil's more obvious mistakes to elect to field in the Ahmedabad —a move that went against one of the damental principles of cricket, by which g last on a new pitch must always be ed. He took ten minutes or more to up his mind, which was perhaps an ation that he was under pressure from ont-line batsman to put the West Indies there was a tinge of green in the wicket. As for the selectors, they were at a dis- ntage in that they had to pick their s blind, without the benefit of watching rs in domestic competitions. Even then, cannot be absolved of all blame for four-day defeats. They hung on too to Mohinder Amarnath, Madan Lal Sandeep Patil. And they were much too impatient with Dilip Doshi, dropping him after only one Test against Pakistan.

I have no doubt that India could have embarrassed, if not beaten, the West Indies had Dilip Doshi played. The selectors should have been quicker also to take cognisance of the performance in the zonal and President's XI matches of the two young pace bowlers, Chetan Sharma and Raju Kulkarni. One or both should have played at Calcutta and the one-day matches, in which containment is the bowler's prime duty, should not have been the starting point of their international careers.



Gavaskar strokes one away: immature batting

Bad Business: The Board of Control for Cricket in India has over the years contributed little to success in the field. But it has prided itself on its business acumen and the vast reserves of wealth it has built up despite indiscriminate expense on its officials. But even on the business side of this season's international cricket, the board did not distinguish itself.

It grossly underpriced the sponsorship by Charminar of the one-day internationals. They made no efforts to get the Test matches sponsored and they also allowed Doordarshan to prey off cricket's popularity. Beholden as they are to government for release of foreign exchange, the board cannot start a dispute over payment for television rights but it can certainly negotiate certain concessions from Doordarshan, the major one being that a Test should not be televised live within a 100 km radius of its venue.

Test matches this season have not filled grounds as in the past. With the weather uncertain, it was understandable that the Test matches against Pakistan at Bangalore and Jalandhar attracted only moderate crowds. It was another matter when the West Indies, the most attractive team in the world, failed to pack a ground as small as Delhi's Ferozeshah Kotla. Undoubtedly, television was responsible.

England are due to tour India next winter. On the evidence of their last tour here, their cricket is not the most entertaining and Indians themselves have so little to offer by way of quality. There is the danger of crowds being even smaller and the board must enlist marketing expertise to check the fall in attendance.

Indian cricketers suffered badly this time from the staging of Test matches out of season. The cricketers went cold into the series against Pakistan and performed below par. Having played below potential in those three Test matches on substandard pitches, they went without confidence to face the stronger West Indian challenge.

Bad Choices: In saying that cricket was marred by politics, I was referring to the allotment of Test matches to Jalandhar and Ahmedabad. Jalandhar was an undersirable Test centre because the ground lacked the basic facilities and because it was unfair to expose players to the perils of a region embroiled in violence. And what justification can there be for the award of a Test match to Ahmedabad where the pitch made a mockery of the match? The site of the Gujarat stadium was absolute wasteland when Ahmedabad was granted a Test match at the expense of Bangalore, a city that has made a valuable contribution to Indian cricket.

The Ahmedabad stadium constituted a hazard to the physical well-being of the players. As Clive Lloyd said, it was fortunate that no batsman was badly injured because of the unpredictable bounce of the pitch. Lloyd added in fact that an Indian batsman might well have been killed if Joel Garner or Colin Croft had been bowling on that diabolical pitch.

The administration of cricket is riddled with intrigue. I really do not know where the solution lies. During another time of such crisis when India lost ignominiously to England in 1976-77, I wrote that its salvation lay in players acquiring a bigger say in shaping the destiny of Indian cricket. But now this opinion has altered, since some of the players who acquired power proved just as unprincipled.

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Company Meeting

The Associated Cement Companies Limited

Statement of the Chairman, Mr. N.A. Palkhivala

The 47th Annual General Meeting of the Company was held on Friday, December 16, 1983 at 3.45 p.m. at Birla Matushri Sabhagar, 19, Sir Vithaldas Thackersey Marg, Bombay 400 020

During the 40 years of control on price and distribution, the cement industry was a stretcher case and remained in a comatose condition despite a series of jabs and potions and poultices administered on weird diagnoses from time to time.

In March 1982 came partial decontrol. The spectacular performance of the cement industry during 1982-83 bears eloquent testimony to the truism that government policies can make or unmake an industry and that in economics there are no miracles but only consequences. The cement industry has left behind the decades when it was festooned with red tape and awash with black money. It has started its arduous march on the road to growth.

The very first year of what may be termed as the New Deal for cement saw production scale a new high of more than 23 million tonnes, while the installed capacity rose from 29.3 million tonnes at the end of 1981-82 to 33.2 million tonnes by 1982-83, and it will rise to 43 million tonnes by the end of the Sixth Five-Year Plan giving an annual growth rate of 14 per cent. During the years 1977-78 to 1981-82, cement production increased by only 8.8 per cent, whereas the overall industrial production index advanced by 19.8 per cent. However, after partial decontrol, cement production increased by 11.4 per cent in 1982-83, whereas overall industrial production increased by only 3.9 per cent.

If even partial decontrol can animate the industry as if by a massive transfusion of vitality and raise it from footnote to first paragraph status in the story of the national economy, what would a total abolition of controls not do by way of transforming the industry?

Keynes in his toast to the Royal Economic Society in 1945 said: "To economics and economists who are the trustees, not of civilization, but of the possibility of civilization". The chances of translating the possibility of civilization into reality are directly proportional to our willingness to shift from economic theology to economic rationalism. I hope we shall never renege on the new policy which is dedicated to purpose and pragmatism rather than ideology and illusion.

The shift in government policy has proved to be a boon for your Company. Our gross revenue crossed the 500-crore mark during the year under review. Our production increased by over three lakh tonnes, while the capacity utilization improved to 84.8 per cent from 82 per cent in the previous year.

In my Statement to you last year, I had mentioned that three conditions are necessary for the New Deal to produce results:

(a) power and other infrastructural bottlenecks must be promptly removed;

(b) every six months prices for levy cement must be punctually revised;

(c) surplus funds of the producers must be prudently ploughed back.

Let me say a word about each.

Power

The main cause of under-utilization of installed capacity continues to be shortage of power. In the case of your Company, power shortage was responsible for a loss of production equivalent to 7.5 lakh tonnes during 1982-83. We have decided to cope with the inadequacy of power from the State grids by installing captive power plants. Such installation will protect your Company's power requirements to the extent of about 60 per cent by 1984-85.

During the current year, the Company plans to instal 15 diesel generating sets at eight cement works, with an aggregate capacity of 45 MW at a cost of Rs. 20 crore. We have already installed a 25 MW captive thermal power plant at Wadi, and 9 MW thermal power capacity is in the process of installation at Chaibasa.

Escalation in costs

Since the announcement of the new pricing policy on February 28, 1982, no price increase has been granted for levy cement. As of July 1983 cost increases aggregated to Rs. 64.89 per tonne–mainly the result of the arbitration award benefiting labour, increased dearness allowance, and enhancements in power tariffs, coal prices and railway freight–all of which were totally beyond the control of the industry.

Levy cement is being supplied by the industry to the government at a price is well below the cost of production. have pointed out on earlier occasion net effect of the refusal to increase the of levy cement despite unavoidable escalations in costs is tantamount to compelling the people of India to subsidize the purchases of cement by the gover It is amazing that in ignoring the n price increase for levy cement, the Government continues to be unencu by remorse or doubt.

The final guarantee of free availab fair market price can only be increa production. But unless the produce compensated for cost escalation, it impossible to finance the sizeable programmes of modernization and rehabilitation which alone can ma increased production possible.

Modernization and Productivity Optimization

Jean Monnet observed, "We do not choice: there is no alternative to modernization except decadence".

For the purposes of modernization expansion, your Company has rese nearly Rs. 60 crore out of the profi years 1981-82 and 1982-83.

The Company proposes to spend crore during the next two years on Productivity Optimization. The th outlay will be at eight of the eleven process plants which are over four old, having been mute, neglected to the era of controls, and which nearly one-third of the Company's capacity.

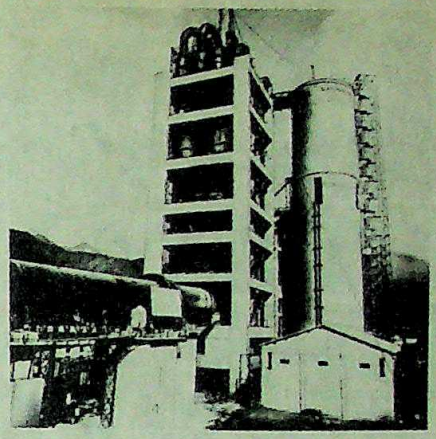
We have decided to increase the for white cement by 50,000 tonnes letter of intent has already been re

New units

On July 24, 1983, the 5.6 lakh t annum kiln at our newest unit at lighted up. At Wadi, the second is scheduled to be commissioned February 1984. We are taking me with all deliberate speed, to increa installed capacity to 9 million ton

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The cement industry has left behind ...e decades when it was festooned ...ith red tape and awash with black ...oney. It has started its arduous ...rch on the road to growth."

...pplied by th... ...ing inflation keeps on pushing up the ...ent at a pric... ...of new plants. The cost of the ...f production... ...mpany's one million tonne plant at Wadi ...lier occasion... ...ne to Rs. 700 per tonne, excluding the ...to increase t... ...of the captive thermal power plant. In ...navoidable ... ...the Ghosh Committee computed the ...antamount t... ...of a million tonne plant at Rs. 1,000 per ...f India to s... ...ne. Today the figure would be Rs. 1,300 ...t by the gove... ...tonne. The cost of a 25 MW captive ...noring the n... ...rmal power plant, to meet all the power ...cement, the ... ...irements of a million tonne plant, would ...to be unec... ...s. 40 crore. This would increase the per ...he cost of installed capacity by Rs. 400, ...hing the aggregate investment cost to ...ut Rs. 1,700 per tonne.

...free availab... ...nly be incre... ...the produc... ...constructing the new plant at Gagal and in ...scalation, i... ...expansion at Wadi, the Company has ...he sizeable ... ...rporated advanced technologies. The ...nization an... ...plants in the cement industry represent ...one can ma... ...at improvement over the older ones. ...possible. ...y will ensure better quality for the ...sumer and result in adequate production ...eet the needs of the country. The era ...n cement sold itself is over. The future ...bring keen competition and accent on ...ity. Your Company welcomes this ...ge in the environment. Priding itself on ...g the leader in the industry, it will ...nue to strive its utmost to make cement ...able at a reasonable price to ...mers in both urban and rural areas.

Productivity

...remember the words of John ...kin–"Quality is never an accident; it is ...ys the result of intelligent effort". The ...rt will have to be intensified–to great ...ic benefit–in the changed environment. ...petitiveness is the unfailing begetter of ...ty goods at reasonable prices. In a free ...et production moves at the command of ...consumer.

...ership and human resources

...ng the year under review, we installed ...powerhouses–diesel/thermal ones at ...Works and Mr. M.A. Wadud Khan at the ...Office. The Company has been ...nate in getting the services of a person ...h high calibre and vision, ...nistrative ability and wide experience. ...an be depended upon to provide the ...site leadership in the years of growth.

Knowledge is the only instrument of production, which is not subject to diminishing returns. The Company has taken concerted steps to strengthen its training facilities, in order to ensure that human resources are available in adequate measure. We realize that training both in India and abroad is a *sine qua non* of increased productivity. We have started recruiting highly qualified technical personnel, in view of the greater demand for trained manpower. Mindful of the fact that qualified manpower is the most valuable asset in a business organization, we attach great importance to sharpening the skills and heightening the competence of our technical personnel at all levels. We shall spend Rs. 80 lakhs on intensive training programmes during the current year.

Social responsibilities

Our Rural Development projects embrace 43 villages adjacent to the Company's works in seven States, benefiting 7 out of 10 families officially classified to be below the poverty line. We put special emphasis on comprehensive health care services through mobile medical units and provision of safe drinking water.

The Company has been taking active steps to protect the environment in the vicinity of the cement plants. We shall employ the latest technology of electrostatic precipitators and dust filters at a total cost of over Rs. 35 crore spread over the next three years.

Overseas projects

We have just completed the second year of our three-year contract at Yanbu, Saudi Arabia, where we shall be shortly taking up additional responsibility. At Kubaisa, Iraq, the plant with an annual capacity of two million tonnes is almost ready for commencement of operation by your Company.

Our earnings in foreign exchange for these two contracts have been Rs. 13.87 crore over the past two years. Even more important is the valuable experience which our personnel have derived from exposure to the latest technologies which are in operation at Yanbu and Kubaisa.

Finance–depreciation and interest charges

To meet the long term requirements of working capital and to provide funds for capital expenditure on modernization and replacement programmes, it is proposed to issue 15 per cent Non-Convertible Debentures of Rs. 100 each, in the aggregate amount of Rs. 35 crore, mainly to the shareholders and we expect a favourable response.

While production from the new cement plants at Wadi and Gagal will contribute towards additional output during the current year, the new plants will become fully productive only in the next year. On account of the commissioning of large new capacities and the implementation of the modernization programme, there will be a heavy burden of depreciation and interest charges, aggregating to Rs. 56 crore during the current year. Thus the current year will have to bear the burden of the expenditure which can only fructify substantially in subsequent years.

We are grateful to those in the Central Government who have understood our manifold problems and helped in their solution; and also to the Governments of the States where our 17 plants are situated, for their co-operation and support. To the widespread ACC family–to everyone of them–our warm, appreciative thanks for their loyalty and devoted work.

Bombay, December 5, 1983

This does not purport to be the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

The Road to Growth

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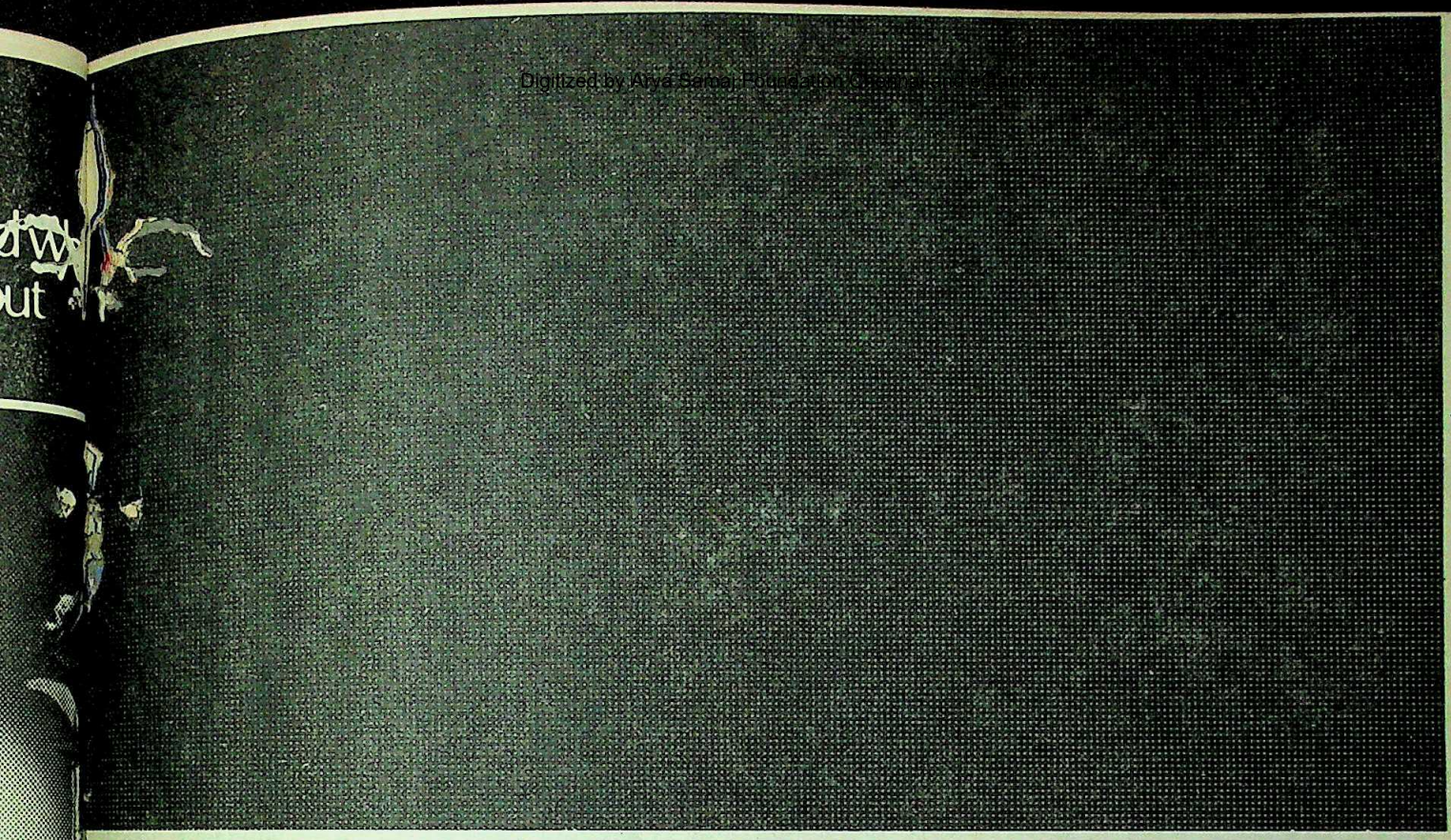
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■ Encomiums have been showered on the stately pyramidal pagodas of the mystic Orient but never have they been described as delicious... not till last fortnight. For, on view vying with other cakes and confections at a cake exhibition in Bangalore was this mammoth edifice of the pagoda standing 8.5 ft tall, fashioned by soft-spoken "cakeist" **C. Ramachandran**, the scion of a leading bakers' house, the Nilgiris. The "sugar pagoda", with its delicate and tip-tilted edges hid an astonishing 86 kg of icing sugar, gelatine, flavouring and colour. Ramachandran, who's had one and a half years' training in bakeries in various parts of Europe, had other mind-boggling exhibits on display including cakes in the shape of a steam locomotive, a romantic castle and a ship, each worth Rs 2,000. As for the pagoda, Ramachandran spent an extravagant Rs 4,500 on the cake and with the aid of four helpers put in 15 days of concentrated work to create the edifice. And there are no prizes for guessing who took the cake for creativity.



Ramachandran and his monument to good taste

■ When the Rs 1 lakh B.D. Goenka Foundation award for excellence in journalism was announced earlier this year, the grim corridors of newspaper offices buzzed with speculation.



Narasimhan: surprise award

Names like Girilal Jain, R.K. Laxman and Arun Shourie were bandied about. But a high-powered and distinguished jury consisting of Nani Palkhivala, Achut Patwardhan, M.V. Desai, Rajmohan Gandhi, Uma Shankar Joshi, Justice A.C. Gupta and Gourkishor Ghosh, pulled out a surprise when they announced **V.K. Narasimhan** as the winner. **Narasimhan, the elderly one-time editor of the** *Financial Express*, the *Indian Express* and the *Deccan Herald*, retired from active journalism to serve as press advisor to the Sai Baba. Doubts about his selection were laid to rest when the jury explained that Narasimhan was given the award for his role in leading the Express chain in its gallant fight during the dark days of the Emergency. Ironically, however, immediately after the lifting of the Emergency Narasimhan resigned from the *Express* in a huff to join the Deccan Herald.

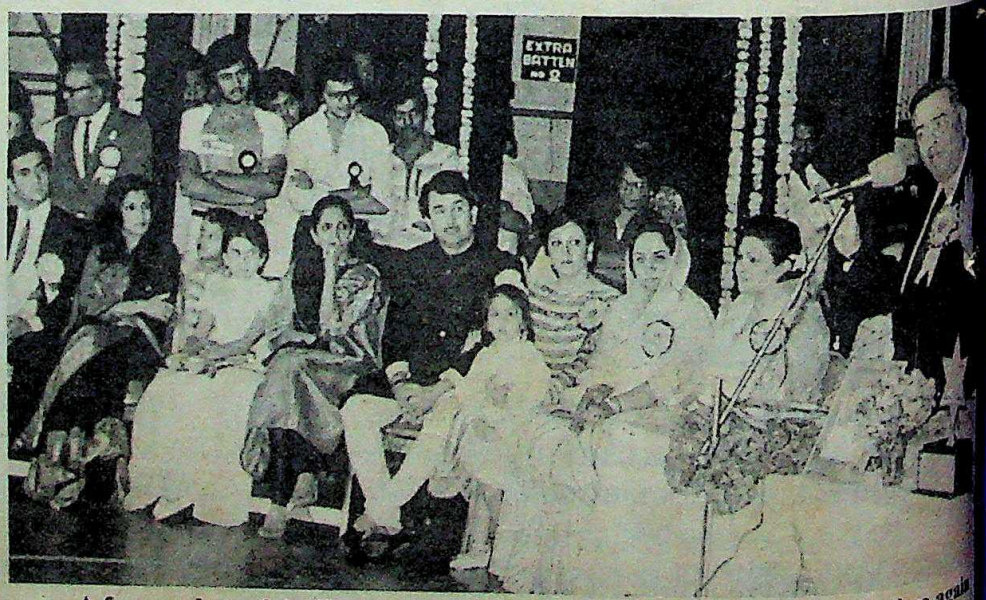
The winner was not only a surprise for journalists but insiders at the *Express* claim that even R.N.Goenka, the octogenarian head of the Express empire, was caught off guard. Apparently he would have preferred somebody from outside the chain to have received it. Local wags have another tale to tell. Apparently all the jury members and Narasimhan have one thing in common. They are all devotees of the Sai Baba.

■ It was a celebration all geared to be talked about. And there's no other way patri... the film world's Kapoo... **Raj Kapoor** would have li... And for the e...rvesc... profile Kapoors there ... cause for celebration ... portly papa's 59th birt... The celebration was orga... by the Lion's Club, Sio... Bombay. It was one occ... that the burgeoning K... clan didn't miss. All the n... rous kith and kin, inclu... brothers, sons, wive... ers-in-law, grandchildren ... phews and nieces rolled ... pay respects to Raj. There ... more glitter and glamo... stars from the screen ... Dimple Kapadia, Raj... Kumar and others descr... When the time came for t... important family portra... lensman had a tough tim... ting all of the Kapoor c... the frame. But what pro... be totally in frame is Raj's ... find— **Mandakini,** a ligh... damsel with a fresh face ... tender look. Mandakini i... to act in Raj's forthcomi... *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* ... also has the veteran's y... son Rajiv Kapoor in th...



SIGN POST

Honoured: The ... versial Punjabi poetess ... Pritam, by Visva-Bhara... versity, with the degree ... Litt honoris causa.



A few members of the Kapoor clan and (above) debutante Mandakini: show time again

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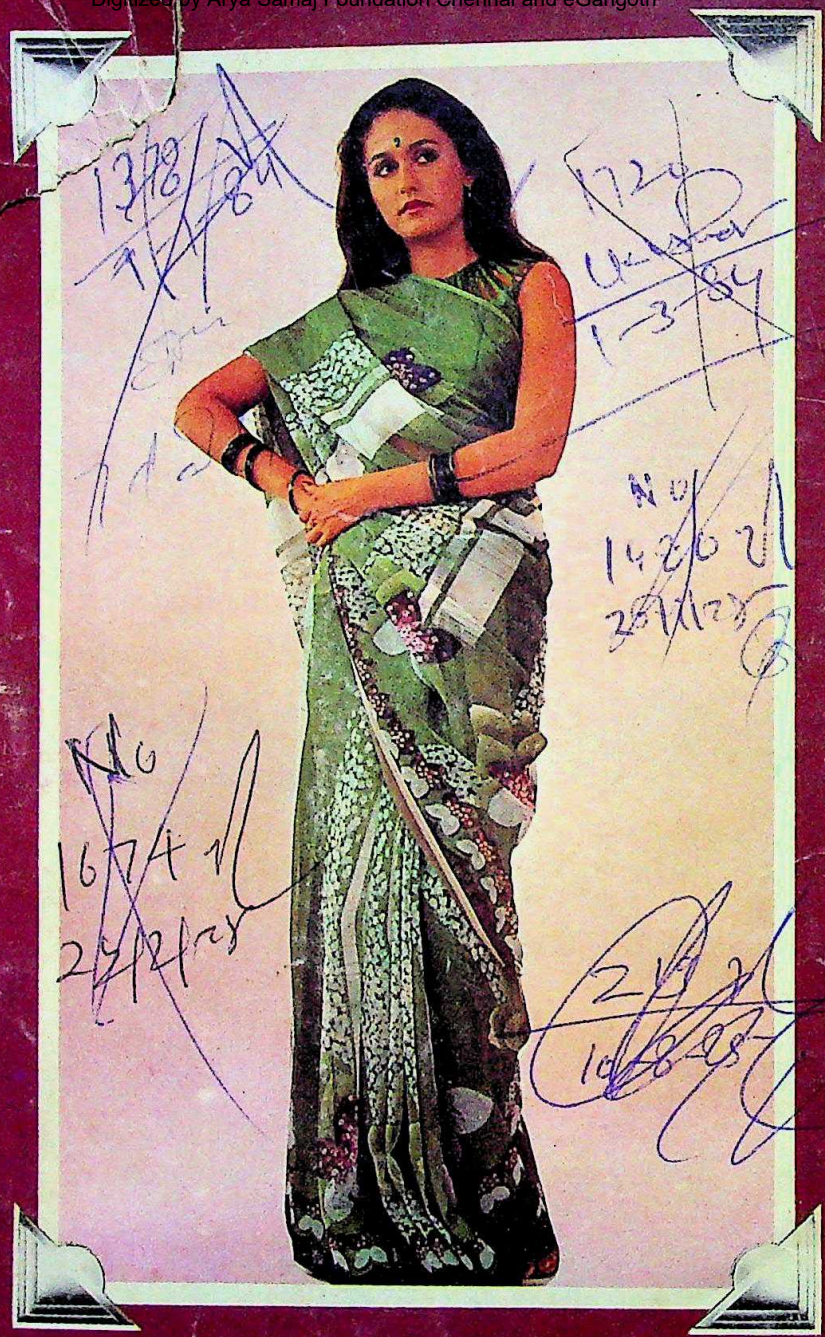
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Voices
Indianotes
Current Events
Jammu & Kashmir: A Contrived Confrontation
By-elections: Some Comfort for Congress
24 Bharatiya Janata Party: Bracing for Battle
29 Lok Dal:Surviving the Strains
30 Punjab: Chaos Continues
35 Karnataka: Weathering the Storm
37 Maharashtra: The Wedding March
38 West Bengal: Going at the Governor
Bihar: Babu Backlash
46 Manipur: Reprieve for the Rebels
50 Assam: The Waiting Game
52 Kerala: Timely Moves
57 Tamil Nadu: Double Role
59 Andhra Pradesh: A Dramatic Escape
Religion
64 Conversions: The Gulf Stream
Special Report
68 N.T. Rama Rao: Playing to the Gallery
Cover Story
74 Congress(I):Gearing for the Poll
Crime
88 Pipariya: Vicious Vendetta
Globe-trotting
US: A Near Miss for Air-India
UK: Tiger by the Tail
UK: Doctors in Trouble
Perspective
US: Afghan Obsession
Special Feature
Madhya Pradesh: Jubilee Flops
Trade Winds
The Economy
Industrialisation: Descent into Mediocrity
Business
Verghese Kurien: Milk on the Boil
Travancore Cements: A New Shareholder
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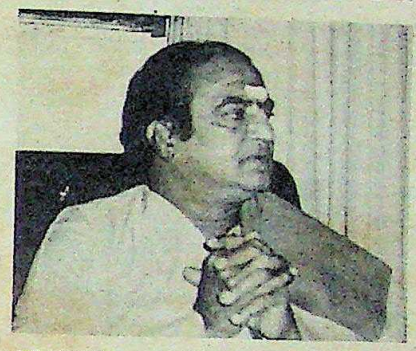
COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY RAGHU RAI



Congress(I)

All over the country, Congress(I) camps are preparing themselves for the 1985 general elections. There is a flurry of activity as the party machinery gets into high gear with key functionaries fanning out into the countryside. However after the division in the anti-Congress votes in the December by-elections the Opposition is now attempting to bridge differences as election fever builds.

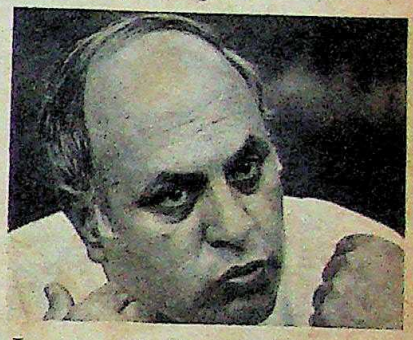
Cover Story ● Page 74



N.T.Rama Rao

N.T. Rama Rao, who made history by scoring a sensational victory over the Congress(I) in Andhra Pradesh, completed one year in office as chief minister last fortnight. His sartorial quirks and populist measures have kept him in the news; but how is the one-time Telugu film superstar faring in his political incarnation? An in-depth report plus an exclusive interview.

Special Report ● Page 68



Jammu & Kashmir

As confrontation escalated in the Kashmir valley last fortnight, the ruling National Conference and the Congress(I) seemed poised for a major showdown. Farooq Abdullah's much-awaited audience with Mrs Gandhi failed to yield much. Meanwhile Congress(I) supporters intensified their campaign to oust Abdullah, by taking the fight into the streets.

Current Events ● Page 18



V. Kurien

Verghese Kurien, the dynamic chairman of the National Dairy Development Board, is the greatest survivor of the Indian public sector. In spite of being in the firing-line constantly, the incredible milkman of Anand has rarely broken his resolve to make Operation Flood a success. But criticism of his method is mounting.

Business ● Page 124



Bombay Gays

A defiant public gathering of gays, or homosexuals, in Bombay recently indicates that their self-imposed social exile is ending. Despite conventional attitudes and outmoded laws, more and more homosexuals are willing to come out into the open. A detailed report on the changing trends.

Lifestyle ● Page 150



Madhya Pradesh

Over two years ago the Madhya Pradesh Government adopted one village in each of the state's 45 districts for intensive development, to mark its 25 years of existence. But as is usual with such generous schemes, there's been a deep gulf between the promises made and the actual reality which exists today.

Special Feature ● Page 112

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

THE WORD anti-national seems to have become a convenient catchword for the present rulers of this country. Mrs Gandhi employs the phrase with reckless abandon during her sporadic and hysterical outbursts. Her political minions often parrot it faithfully. Till now, the fact that it has been usually directed at her political opponents has succeeded in diluting much of its sting. In recent times, however, Mrs Gandhi has been using the phrase with growing indiscrimination and in reference to anything and anybody that remotely suggest criticism against her. The India-is-Indira slogan has come to acquire a dangerous and distorted message; any criticism against her is criticism of the country.

That is not just a statement based on observation but on personal experience, since INDIA TODAY *has now been placed under that all-encompassing label. At a press conference in Calcutta on the concluding day of the ruling party's convention,* INDIA TODAY *Principal Correspondent* SUMIT MITRA *asked Mrs Gandhi what, in the circumstances, was a perfectly reasonable and logical question. Identifying himself as a representative of the magazine, Mitra queried: "Madam, you are the president of the Congress(I) party. As the president, how do you assess the performance of the next tier of leadership in your party, that is the general secretaries?" Mrs Gandhi seemed to have not heard the question properly, so Mitra repeated it, ending with: "How do you assess the performance of your general secretaries, particularly that of Rajiv Gandhi?" Mrs Gandhi's reaction was startling. She flared up, saying: "I'll not answer the question." Then she demanded: "What sort of question is this? Is it of any importance? I have read your magazine and you publish a lot of dirt, some of which is downright anti-national. I am not opposed to freedom of the press but freedom of the press does not mean writing things which are not in the national interest. I say one thing and you write differently in your magazine. That's what you do every time."*

INDIA TODAY *is not unaccustomed to having things said about it. Fortunately, the magazine draws on an abundance of goodwill from its readers, and the barbs usually come from politicians unwilling to accept its independence. India's free press is now a well entrenched and flourishing institution—according to the Registrar of Newspapers there are 19,144 publications with a total circulation of over 5 crore. These publications do not exist on the sufferance of politicians but depend on their readers. The media operates within the laws of the land and is liable for punishment if it violates them. Facing criticism is as much a professional hazard for the media as it is for politicians. But for a mature and experienced person like the prime minister, known for her adroit handling of the media, the outburst was not only unexpected but intemperate. At best, it seems to have been based on the reference to Rajiv Gandhi in the question. In the circumstances, however, even the most ardent Mrs Gandhi supporter would hardly find fault with the propriety and the importance of the question.*

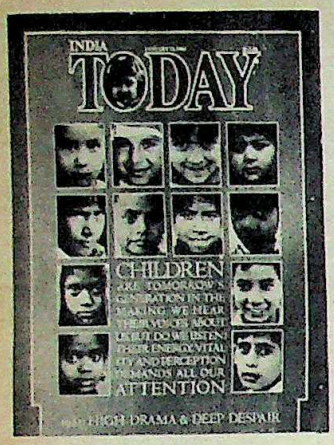
The party had just finished an exhaustive exercise in self-assessment and Rajiv Gandhi's role as the second most important person after Mrs Gandhi could hardly have been over-emphasised: He is, officially, one of the five general secretaries of the party and the question referred to that, not to his position as Mrs Gandhi's son. As The Telegraph *aptly put it in its editorial on the subject: "If Mr Rajiv Gandhi is going to take decisions that affect our lives, then we want to know how good he is at taking those decisions. And since his mother, apart from being his mother, is also president of the Congress(I), she is the best person to address the question to." Mitra's question still deserves a serious reply, not an abusive dismissal.*

AS FOR being "anti-national" or publishing "dirt", it is unnecessary to reply to such a smear. Fortunately, in our business, what we are is on display each fortnight for everyone to judge. Suffice it to say that INDIA TODAY *is a serious, independent and responsible magazine and is generally regarded as such. There is no monopoly on patriotism and we feel as concerned about the integrity and unity of India as Mrs Gandhi. In the course of doing our job we have exposed facts which Mrs Gandhi may have regarded as inconvenient. But that is the role of the free press. "Journalism", as one respected practitioner of the profession put it years ago, "is the conveyance of information from here to there with accuracy, insight and despatch, and in a manner that the truth is served, and the rightness of things is slowly if not immediately made evident." India is a democratic country and hopefully will remain so. And so long as it does,* INDIA TODAY *will endeavour to fulfil such a role.*



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INNOCENT VOICES

The voices recorded in the cover story ("Children: Speaking Out," January 15) provided a glimpse of honesty and conviction with which the children of today think and speak. The photographs especially the one of the little girl lifting a load are superb.

Calcutta *Nirendra Nagar*

■ The tiny voices of our children clearly echo deep-seated love and desire to work for India, which is likely to fade out gradually as they grow up and face the reality of the society and the environmental set-up. In a society plagued by corruption and professional mediocrity it will not be surprising if this coming generation also gets forced to conform to it.

Ghaziabad *Pieush Meattle*

■ Your selection of the topic for the cover story was indeed commendable. Amid all the politics, sports and films etc it came as a pleasant surprise.

But somehow the impressive statements coming from children aged merely 11 and 12 years sound a bit too loud-mouthed and rather unbelievable. Your article deals more with such statements rather than with any concrete solutions.

Durg, Madhya Pradesh *Sangeeta Verma*

■ Your feature tried to lay the entire blame for the indigence and maltreatment of the children on the Government. The tendency to put the blame for everything on the Government is an essentially Indian trait. Why blame Mrs Gandhi outright? After all she cannot provide all the basic amenities to all the 260 million children. The blame should be put on the parents who believe that contraception is a sin on religious grounds. This is the root cause for the problems of our country.

Hyderabad *A. Nataraj*

■ The story of the disdainful monarch can have a better ending only if the gamut of emotions aroused by your cover story can be translated into visible action. If each one of the readers can honestly undertake to spare an hour every day for the betterment of any one of those millions of deprived children, soon enough the monarch will be compelled to take heed.

New Delhi *Sundeep Khanna*

■ Your cover was such a relief after the usual photographs of politicians, business magnates, cricket players and film stars. It is time the nation paid heed to children's views.

Srinagar *Avtar Raina*

■ I read with interest your article on the children but it fell below my level of expectations. A couple of children interviewed, for instance, talked through their "esteemed" hats. Gaurav Wadhavan haughtily states that he would give bribes if necessary. This statement in itself reveals his state of immaturity when asked to answer such stupid questions. But Gaurav should not be blamed for this as he is not oblivious of things going on around him.

According to Ashok Rajrishi people are basically lazy and he says that Indians are not as hardy as their American or Japanese counterparts. But, dear Ashok, there is another reason for their laziness, and that is the lack of incentives. After working hard all month, an executive brings home his salary, or rather a fraction of his actual salary since an extremely large portion goes towards taxes. So, kids, what can we do? Nothing, just cry.

Calcutta *Nikhil Srinivasan*

THE YEAR THAT WAS

"High Drama & Dark Despair" was a beautiful written essay condensing and covering all the important events of the year. Had it been filmed it would have been a good documentary.

Hyderabad *S.B. Prasannaiah*

■ It is a pity to note that the toning up of Rekha's image by an Indianised version of Jane Fonda's work-out sessions has become a more important event than Michael Ferreira winning the World Amateur Billiards title which was totally ignored.

Madurai *S. Peter Suresh*

TESTING COMMENTS

Dicky Rutnagur's coverage on the recently concluded West Indies-India Test series ("Cricket: Failing the Tests", January 15) was in poor taste, especially so in the context of the writer's unduly biased and harsh attitude towards Gavaskar.

Calcutta *Rupak Saha*

■ Dicky Rutnagur has gone to the extent of suggesting Gavaskar's exclusion from the Madras Test. Apparently he had written t... before Test began. What does he have to s... now? I suppose he will write pages ... pages in praise of him.

This tendency of bringing any play... down to the rock-bottom and then pushin... him up very high on the basis of a couple ... performances is a trait that prevails in Ind... alone and is damaging to the player.

Udaipur *Rajendra Bhanaw...*

GALLUP POLL

The Opinion Poll (January 15) though... good trend turns out to be a futile effort. ... random sampling done in 14 cities is bare... sufficient to represent the vast population ... this nation with diversified cultures and ... lues. At the same time the size of the samp... 5,715, is virtually negligible to represent o... 300 million voters.

It is most unfortunate that the ru... section which plays an important role in t... political game of the country is totally ... glected.

Agra *Rakesh Ver...*

SURVIVING THE BITE

William Haast, of Miami Serpentari... fame, pioneered human immunisati... against snake venom in 1947. Since he ... daily risking snakebite he made his own ... cine: merely diluted and detoxified ... venom. He used a "cocktail" of cobra, ... and king cobra venoms. He has survi... over 150 bites. Dr Yoshio Sawai of the Jap... Snake Institute took this experiment seve... steps further and is helping us to develo... vaccine for members of our cooperative.

Now antivenom is easily available a... you can even choose your own brand! ... we must emphasise how valuable snakes ... as rodent controllers. Snakebite, itself, ne... not be a traumatic experience, all we must ... is ensure that antivenom is readily availab... Make sure the nearest dispensary stocks ... —the dried form has a shelf life of five ye... no refrigeration.

Madras *Romulus White...*
Presid...

Irula Snake Catcher's coopera...

SPY vs SPY

The media as well as the discussions ... Parliament have blown up the Larkins af... a bit too much. Too much publicity and ... cussion on defence matters have reperc... ions on the morale of serving service pers... nel. Defence matters should be dealt with ... screetly, without such fanfare and public...

In your cover story you mention ... the Kirloskars have employed a retired ... gadier as a consultant. It is a matter of p... that they are one of the few industrial hou... who have given employment to many ret... service personnel, while the Government ...

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other so called welfare organisations meant for ex-servicemen do only lip-service. Hence there is no sinister motive on the part of the Kirloskars in employing ex-servicemen.

New Delhi *S.T.V. Raghavan*

■ A complete reorganisation of the intelligence agencies and a strict ban on unauthorised persons' entry into sensitive areas, including the Defence Ministry library, are the need of the hour. As far as the former is concerned, we can expect a lot from the recently appointed Shankaran Nair, as he is the most suitable person for the job in the country.

Jaipur *G. Manmadhan Pillai*

■ Your coverage on the spy trade was excellent. Not only in defence but in every other profession as well, one has to forgo a lot of facilities after retirement. That doesn't mean that you can take the country for a ride. It is high time the so-called responsible people learn to live with responsibility.

Bangalore *S.E. Asuti*

■ Undoubtedly our intelligence system is both inadequate and vulnerable, insofar as external spying and counter espionage within the country is concerned. The whole system needs to be modernised, with no political interference, minimum bureaucratic control and no overlapping in the working of the various agencies. Simultaneously, the activities of top-ranking former service officers in the arms trade and their involvement in politics needs to be curbed.

Srinagar *Shoukat A. Malik*

■ The Larkins brothers may not be the only persons involved in spying activities under the umbrella of the CIA. There may also be a number of religious leaders and top-ranking politicians being patronised by the said agency, (one of them has already been named). A thorough investigation may raise many more monsters. Shoot them!

Siliguri *R.K. Gulati*

■ Your cover story talks, about our CIA connection and the organisation of our intelligence departments, but it says very little of other foreign intelligence agencies such as KGB which have not been entirely innocent of espionage, either.

In a recent high court case in Delhi a prominent lawyer has alleged that in India there are now 10,000 KGB agents. He has given names of four high-ranking KGB officials now posted in Delhi who were earlier expelled by other governments in the West. With over 2,000 East bloc diplomats and 3,000 other personnel of Aeroflot, Tass etc, —a strength which is five times more than the diplomatic strength of US, UK and Federal Republic of Germany—we cannot therefore be naive enough to assume that KGB is not active in India.

In 1975 one serving senior air force officer was caught in liaison with a Soviet national. The officer was dismissed from service and punished while a number of Soviet diplomats were expelled. That was more serious than the present case involving retired officers. But that case did not get much publicity.

The present case is being grabbed gladly by the press as sensational news. But it is causing the impression that the CIA is the only force against India. Such a lopsided stance is likely to be counter-productive to our national interest.

24-Parganas, West Bengal *P.K. Patil*

BILLIARDS WIZARD

Your article on Michael Ferreira ("Champion of the Cue", December 31) clearly underlines the multiple yardsticks used by the Indian people and the Government in judging the merits of "world champions".

While the Indian Prudential Cup victory and Gavaskar's 29th century were hailed throughout the country, the news of Ferreira retaining the World Amateur Billiards title for the third time got him a mere few inches on the sports page. No victory dinner, no victory nite, no DDA flat nor Maruti car for poor Mike.

New Delhi *Deepak Bhatia*

■ Michael Ferreira has rightly pointed out that in India sports means cricket and only cricket. This does not refer only to the general public but even to the journalists. When you could put Prudential Cup winners on the cover you should have done justice to Ferreira who has won the championship for the third time in six years. He surely deserved more coverage than a single page at the back of the magazine.

New Delhi *Arvind Kumar Singh*

DOUBLE STANDARDS

Mrs Gandhi has no right to take part in the NAMEDIA and talk about true or false reporting when AIR and Doordarshan voice only her opinions and ideas (Comment, December 31). She can't blame the newspapers for biased reporting because she controls the press. But as far as the foreign journalists are concerned she has all the time in the world for them as she is concerned about her image abroad.

Ahmedabad *Ketan Yagnik*

QUESTION OF COMMAND

Hats off to General Sinha! (December 31) It is surprising that even in strategic departments like defence, merit and integrity are not appreciated. The Government could have done itself honour by appointing General Sinha the chief of army staff, and there by saved some pan of its credibility at least in the public eye.

Madras *D. Santishree*

■ Do you really, like General Sinha, think that the present political leadership has no business to interfere in the appointment of the army chief?

The Government (the present leadership) has discharged its legitimate constitutional responsibility to appoint General Vaidya as the chief.

Where did you smell the rat? Where is political interference? Mere supercession does not mean political interference. And why can't the Government or the political leadership interfere in the affairs of the army of the armed forces? Our army is the country's army.

New Delhi *Dr Y.N. Singh*

POLITICAL GAME

In your cover story on Ramakrishna Hegde (December 15) you have made certain observations about my party—the Congress(I)—and myself, which are sweeping, baseless and absurd. You have alleged that some Union ministers from Karnataka and Punjab are involved in the toppling game and that I am one of them. You claim that I had been assigned the task of getting three MLA's to join the Congress(I) in Karnataka. You have also suggested that I am one among several Union ministers in the state, keen on grabbing the office of the chief minister.

I am not involved in state politics at all; I am too busy carrying out the responsibility which the leader of my party has bestowed on me.

New Delhi *S. M. Krishna*

Information for the story came from sources within the Congress(I), including people who are close to Mr Krishna. We stand by our story.

—Editor

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KOTHARI (Madras) LIMITED Declares a 15% Dividend

Diversified Industrial Base — brings Strength, Stability, Success



Dr. D.C. KOTHARI, Chairman

The Company gains new ground with Textiles Division's modernisation scheme, plantation crops buoyant, and expansion of chemical plant nearly completed.

FINANCIAL POSITION OF THE COMPANY

	1976	1980	1981	1983
		(Rs. in lakhs)		
Share Capital	241	489	502	555
Reserves & Surplus	193	548	990	2832
Net worth	434	1037	1493	3387

ECONOMIC CLIMATE

1982-83 was a year of difficult economic conditions, slackening turnover and falling profits. Adverse forces — infrastructural malfunctioning, instability in stock markets, slow-down in bank credit expansion and other extraneous factors — had their impact on your Company's performance.

YOUR COMPANY'S PERFORMANCE

Textiles:
A credit squeeze and drastic power cuts notwithstanding, the textile division had a good level of capacity utilisation. The investment in two 860 KVA diesel generators at Coimbatore has paid off. The modernisation programme is in progress, as a result of which productivity has increased. With the commissioning of an autoconer, automatic pirn winder and 107 Lakshmi Ruti 'C' Type looms, blended fabrics of superior quality are being turned out.

Plantations:
Though tea production was hit by the drought in Tamil Nadu, this was offset by a higher average price procured. The enhanced Minimum Release Price for coffee announced by the Government has brought cheers to the industry and would, to some extent, stabilise the returns to the growers. Both the crop and the price were above the estimated levels. The Coffee Curing Works at Hassan with high-cost sophisticated machinery did fairly well despite strong competition.

Fertilisers:
Because of the severe drought last year, all fertiliser factories has a low capacity utilisation. The recent downward revision in prices has improved consumption, and with timely rains, prospects for the current year have brightened considerably. Despite power cuts and erratic supply of raw materials, full production was maintained in the Sulphuric Acid Plant and Superphosphate production touched 75% of last year's level.

Chemicals:
The Chemical Plant was worst hit by power cuts, because power is the basic raw material for caustic soda production. This resulted in a low capacity utilisation of only 49%. The expansion of the Chemical Plant from 100 to 200 TPD is expected to be commissioned in stages this year. A project for captive power generation is under our serious consideration. We had introduced titanium anodes in place of graphite anodes last year for greater energy conservation. It proved successful, and all graphite anodes are now proposed to be replaced with titanium anodes.

THE CURRENT YEAR

With better power back-up in our Textiles and Fertilisers, expanded capacity in Chemicals and likely enhanced power supply, the prospects for 1983-84 appear distinctly better. Based on these, a cautious estimate for the current year would be:

	1982-83 (Actuals)	1983-84 (Estimates)
	(Rs. in lakhs)	
Turnover	5236	7150
Profit before interest and depreciation	670	1135
Interest	246	330
Depreciation	309	480
Profit before tax	115	325

CHANGE OF NAME

To reflect the all-India stature of the Company, its expanded capital base and multifarious activities, a change of its name is being proposed. In order to reflect the varied industrial activities, the Board of Directors has decided to change it to KOTHARI INDUSTRIAL CORPORATION LIMITED subject to compliance of legal formalities.

This is an abridged version of the Statement made by Dr. D.C. Kothari, Chairman, at the 14th Annual General Meeting of the Company. For full text, write to KOTHARI (Madras) LIMITED:

1. "Kothari Buildings," 114, Nungambakkam High Road, Madras 600 034.
2. 144-145, Mittal court, 'A' Wing, 14th Floor, Nariman Point, Bombay 400 021.

NOTE : This does not purport to be a report of the 14th Annual General Meeting held on 23rd December 1983, at Madras.

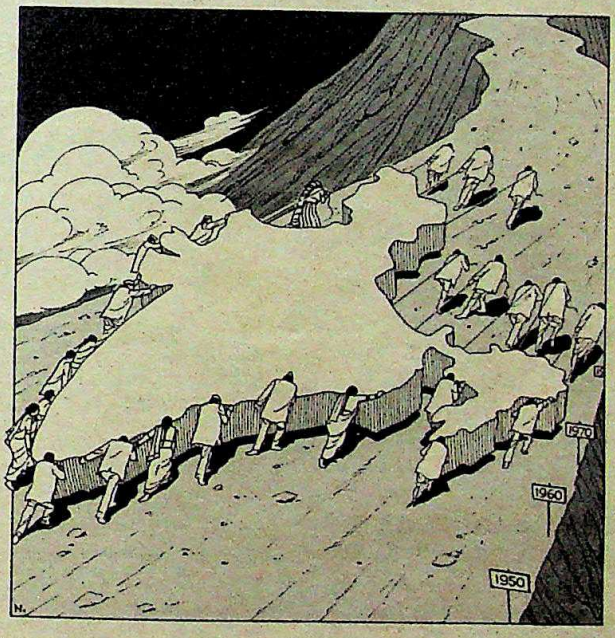
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INDIA TODAY
THE COMPLETE NEWSMAGAZINE

Change-Resistant

WHETHER or not the prime minister calls a snap poll in the next 10 weeks or 250, there is a pungent odour of election in the air. And so countless foreheads crease with the question: is political change lurking in the corners of India's huge, volatile democratic landscape? Electoral change is no longer beyond the realm of the possible in India. It happened in 1977. It happened in 1980. At the level of state politics, it happened as early as January 1983. Electoral change may or may not happen as a result of the next poll. But with so much happening, is Indian politics really changing? If it is, what precisely is the nature and the dimension of change, and what does change mean for the vast masses of our people? What exactly is changing? The structure of the party system? The values of political life? The voting patterns? The quality of politicians? Towering over all these inadequately answered questions is another that compels attention. Are we as a people ready for rapid change? Do we desire "the bitter change of fierce extremes", in the words of Tennyson? Or are we content and comfortable with the small change of change. Slow and gradual change that won't upset the frame of our life, the scheme of our ancient universe too soon, too abruptly, too rudely?



In a period of 36 years much indeed has happened in India. Wars, famine, floods and drought have visited us leaving little trace. Foreign aid missions, World Bank and IMF teams, and numerous scholars ranging from Myrdal and Moynihan have come and gone leaving little visible impact. We have had five prime ministers, six Presidents, seven national elections, half a dozen cabinet scandals. Our politicians, once men and women of stature, have been reduced to fugitives from the law of low averages.

To be sure, scores of observers have documented change at various micro levels of Indian society. Anthropologists have traced the progress of tribal groups from forest to factory. Thousands of tribals today are unrecognisable from the time of Independence. So is it in the Harijan community. Political scientists have noted shifts of the political scenery in a district or a state as a result of change in the fortunes of a party, a faction, a chief minister. The "green revolution" has changed the face of Punjab and Haryana. Economists have observed the rise and decline of the promises of successive five-year plans. The population has more than doubled since India woke up at midnight 36 years ago.

However, when it comes to spatial substantive change, the prognosis for India has varied from the negative to the extremely cautious. Myrdal's massive inquiry in the '60s into the poverty of nations was conducted in India; his prognosis was that change in India, at the macro or national level, would be tortuously slow. With 60 per cent of its population still illiterate, the economy crawling at a pace only marginally above the rate of population growth, with 70 per cent of the people still tied up with what is undoubtedly one of the most conservative and unchanging agrarian systems in the world, India is essentially a change-resisting rather than change-inducing country. Much has been said of the "resilience" of the Indian peasantry. It is probably very little beyond an elaborate survival mechanism. Historian Percival Spear found among the Indian people an enormous capacity to retreat from political authority and the dicta of nature. He called it a process of "encapsulation". The dynamics of electoral politics have brought the "encapsuled" masses into the vortex of national politics. But they are still far from forging themselves into an instrument of radical, even substantive, change.

THE VERY structure of Indian politics inhibits change of this nature. Hundreds of millions participate in a parliamentary system that is inherently federal in character. India is sufficiently regionalised by language, history and physical features. What happens in Maharashtra can have only a ripple impact on Tamil Nadu or West Bengal. Indians belonging to one state hardly know what their civic brethren in another state are thinking or writing. In dealing with the world's most variegated social and political entity, politicians must be wary of radical departures. The pull of the track traversed is stronger than the lure of uncharted tracks.

Neither in the realm of thought nor of action is India bold, innovative, radical. There is a great premium on continuity. Robert Frost wrote in one of his poems: "Most of the change we think we see in life Is due to truths being in and out of favour." In India "truths" tend to be endlessly in favour; they are seldom cast away. Our political landscape is bereft of the excitement of new truths. The debates that rage in Delhi are inaudible in the 6 lakh villages. The political parties are indistinguishable from one another. The opposition parties see themselves, in their reluctant moments of boldness, as substitutes for the ruling party. Not as alternatives.

Elections will change the cast in the slowly unfolding Indian drama. The script will not change more than marginally. For a while, the dialogue may sound somewhat new. But soon it will fall into the accepted and acceptable pattern. The very size and nature of Indian politics allow political actors only a narrow margin for manoeuvre. This is built into India's anatomy and is confirmed by India's experience of 36 years, more particularly of the last decade and a half.

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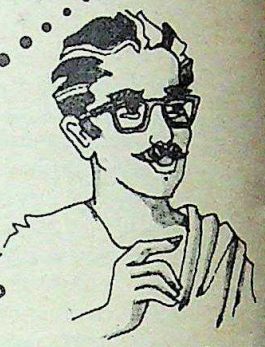
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Baidyanath CHYAWANPRASH

Nature's care for everyone



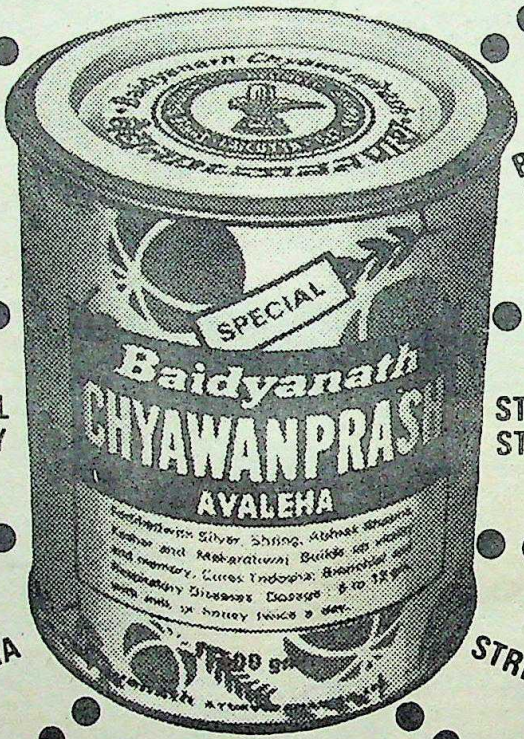
ENERGY



BRONCHIAL PROBLEMS



YOUTHFUL VITALITY





STRESS & STRAIN



STAMINA



STRENGTH

An ayurvedic tonic for the family

Why Baidyanath Chyawanprash ?

Because it is made from over 50 herbal ingredients containing natural vitamins which are easily absorbed by the human digestive system, unlike other tonics containing chemically made vitamins that are not totally absorbed by the body.

- It is rich in natural Vitamin C
- It prevents cold and cough
- It corrects Calcium deficiency and anaemia
- It protects against stress and strain
- It restores youthful vitality
- It gives strength and stamina
- It prevents constipation, acidity and indigestion

Baidyanath manufactures over 700 Ayurvedic medicines at 5 modern factories

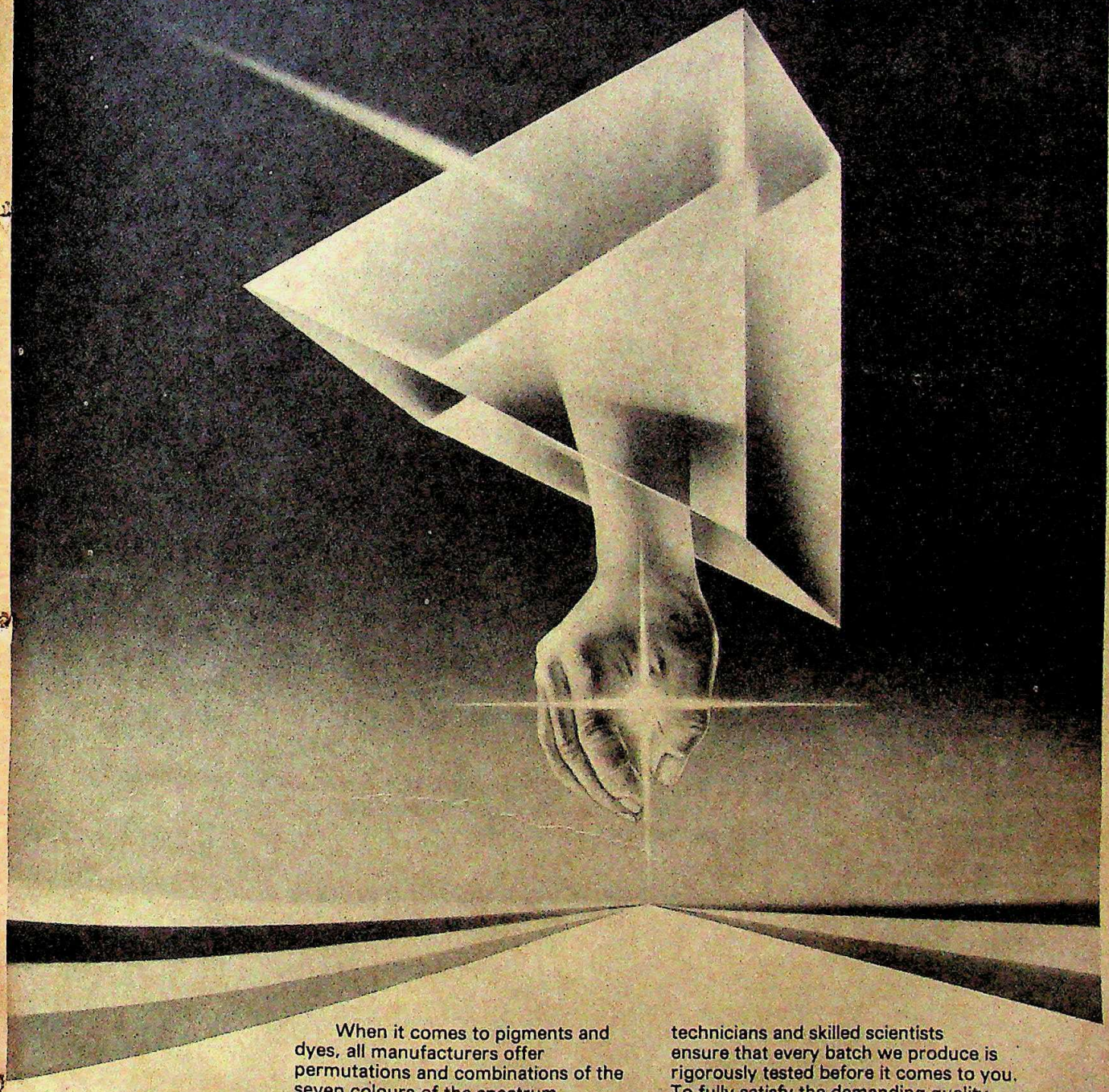
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Colour-Chem gives the spectrum an eighth colour.



When it comes to pigments and dyes, all manufacturers offer permutations and combinations of the seven colours of the spectrum.

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» Like "non-violence", the terms "god" and "religion" are also being eliminated o are taking on new meanings. If you say "I love my god", you will be understood to hav said, "I love Amitabh Bachchan, Dhirendra Brahmachari or Khushwant Singh."
—*George Menezes in* The Indian Expres

» Journalists seem to believe that as long as they do not accept cash in their indiv dual capacities, they are being ethical. Politicians and industrialists are encouraged t pour lakhs into press clubs and this blatant bribery is regarded as ethical.
—*A comment in* Impri

» The Opposition may be criticised for making corruption charges a convenient weapon against the Congress(I). But never before has the entire administrative system been accused of such rampant dishonesty.
—*Kuldip Nayar in* Gentlem

» I think I have had enough of the country's attention. Perhaps I am a bit compl cent because I have reached a stage where success or failure doesn't stir me up as it use to do before.
—*Sunil Gavaskar in* Sund

» I am first of all a citizen of the world, therefore I have to serve the human rac Secondly, I am an Indian, therefore I have to serve India. Number three, I am a Hind therefore I have to do my bit for Hinduism.
—*Karan Singh in* Debon

» If Mrs Gandhi's record over the last few years is any guide, her cynicism in reta ning power might get the better of her Nehru tradition. In other words, she could tu brazenly communal.
—*Kewal Verma in* The Telegra

» The human mind may be profound or brittle....But there is a shallow spiky el ment in all our personalities...which takes vicarious delight in seeing people, especial the eminent and the loud-mouthed, slip on a banana skin.
—*Sasthi Brata in* The Illustrated Weekly of In

» If I find even one (video) cassette of *Coolie* in India, I will not hesitate to bash t the person who owns it, who lends it and also the person who's watching it....Aft that, I will strip him and beat him up.
—*Manmohan Desai in* Cine Bl

» I know I am good-looking. I think I am sexy...and my friends have always told m I am pretty...as a teenager...people tended to dismiss me off as dumb and brainle just because I was beautiful!
—*Moon Moon Sen in* Standu

» Not every female is interested in getting closeted in a room with a cricketer
—*Marshneil Gavaskar in* Soc

» He (Amitabh Bachchan) won't act with me now, he's scared I'll turn the tab
—*Rajesh Khanna quoted in* The Times of In

» There's too much of tomtomming about acting for nothing at all—but I c assure you it's simpler than falling off a log. It's the easiest thing in the world. Anybo can do it.
—*Amjad Khan in* Filmf

» If I was to go and dance Bharatnatyam in a night club...or dance on my head dance on a sword, then you can call it commercialisation.
—*Sonal Mansingh in* The Sunday Obse

» What are you talking of Meerut? I am the criminal of Meerut sitting here in fr of you!
—*Shahi Imam Bukhari of Jama Masjid in* Su

» In our films a woman's body has become the unhappy playground on which pr ducer and censor play a perpetual game of hide and seek.
—*B.K. Karanjia in* Scr

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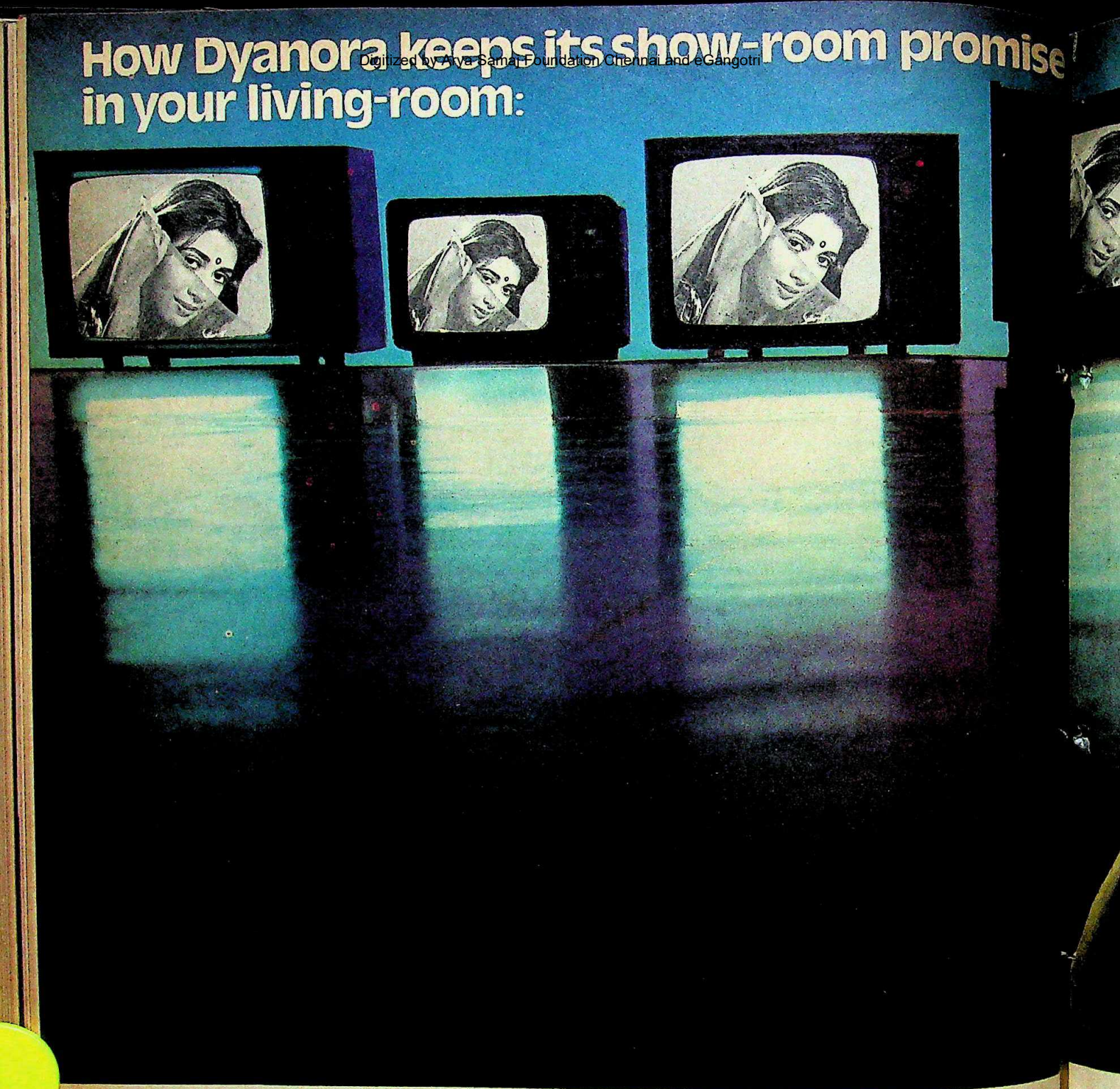
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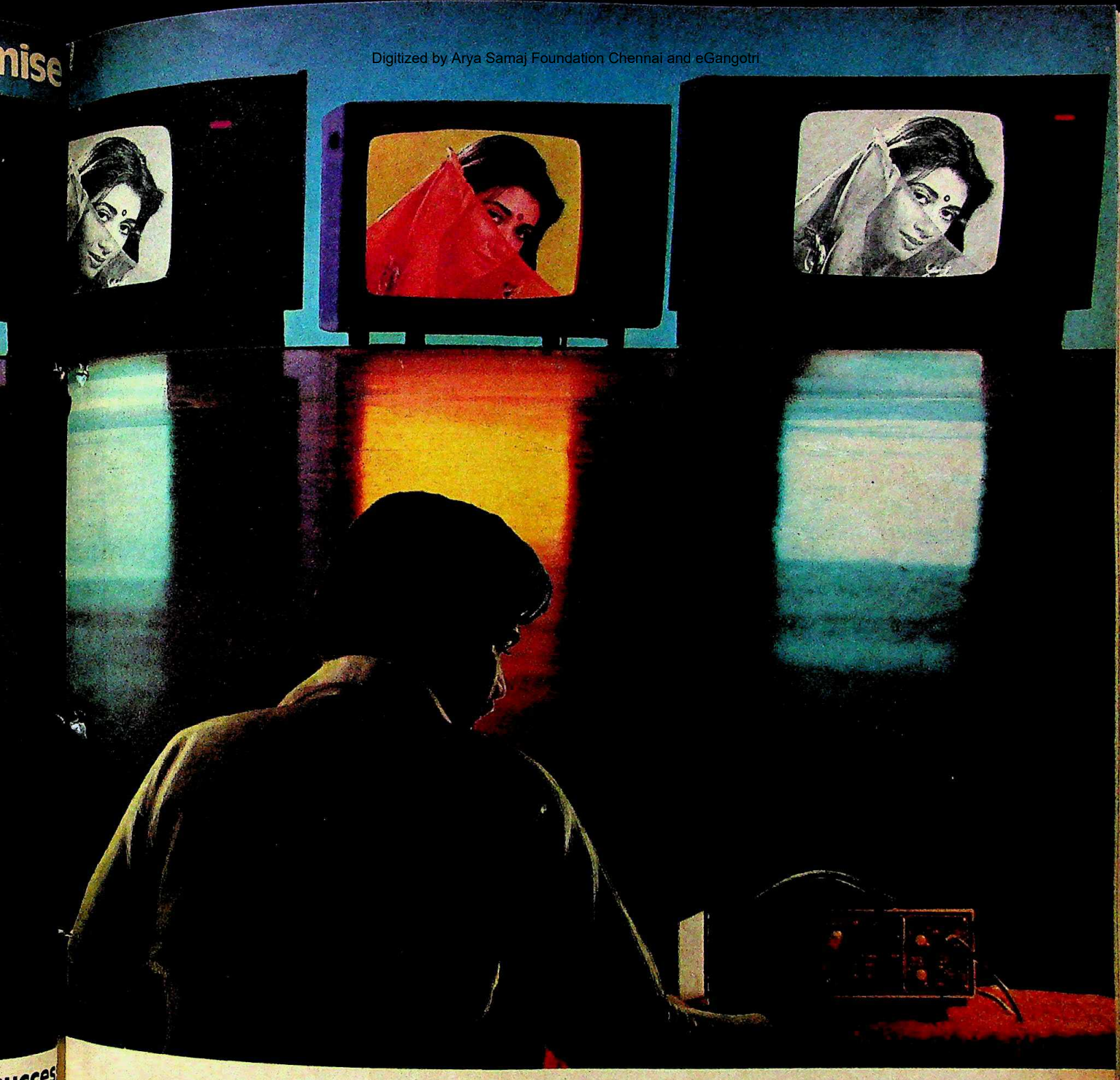
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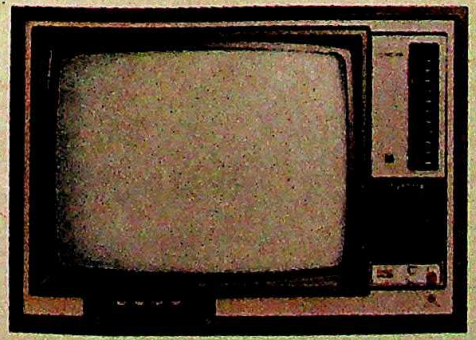


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WRONG NUMBER

■ Lotteries are happy enterprises which make money for almost everybody involved—the organisers, the ticket agents, and the fortunate person who bought ticket number ABC34500B2 on a whim and had the satisfaction of seeing it pip every other at the post. But the Government has a reputation to keep—and it was in keeping with this sea of red ink that the Delhi Transport Corporation, an old hand at the game, spent Rs 8.61 lakh on the lottery it introduced for its bus tickets some time ago. The returns: about Rs 3.5 lakh in advertisements for the backs of tickets.

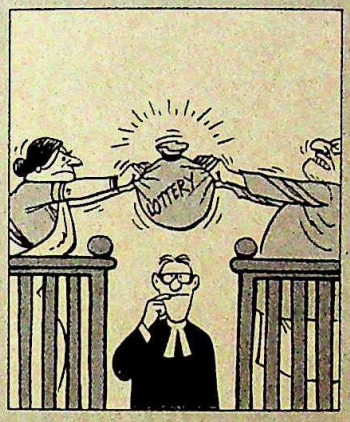
What the report of the comptroller and auditor-general of India delicately calls "infructuous expenditure" would, it is clear, have been considerably more if the scheme had been more popular with the public: there were in all 464 prizes totalling Rs 4.46 lakh, but precisely 16 people turned up to claim their boodle. Fully Rs 4.2 lakh in prizes was saved. But the staff did not hesitate to claim Rs 6.41 lakh in overtime. You can't beat the pros when it comes to busting the bank.

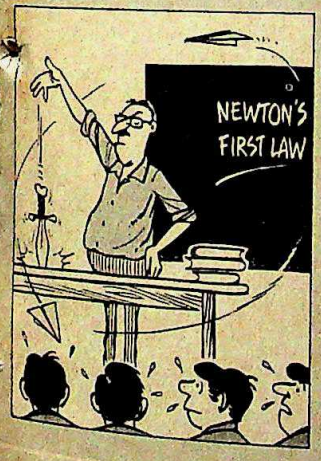


WINNING SUIT

■ Talking about lotteries, one solitary ticket has the Kuttappan household in Kottayam in a spin. Kuttappan won the respectable sum of Rs 7 lakh in the Kerala state lottery recently. The story thereafter only goes to illustrate the pithy saying that evangelists are so fond of spouting while they rake in the donations: the love of money is the root of all evil. For Chellamma, Kuttappan's better half, says that the money should go to her and has taken the matter to court.

Kuttappan is not going to give up so easily, wife or no wife. His story is that after the result appeared, he had a banker verify the ticket number, and deposited the ticket in a bank, taking good care to sign on the back. Chellamma does not seem to dispute this, but disputes a lot else, saying that it was she who had bought the ticket in the first place and, later, that it was she who gave Kuttappan the Rs 10 needed to open the account in the bank so that the ticket could be deposited safely. What complicates the issue is that Chellamma is his third wife living separately while he lives with his two sisters. Here is one couple which is taking life's lottery very seriously.





FIRST LESSON

■ Be gentle with children, they say, the old idea of sparing the rod and spoiling the child no longer holds good, they say, corporal punishment is out, they say. But they have never had to take care of a roomful of strong, energetic students with homicidal tendencies, as a physics teacher in a Dholpur school had to do—and teach in the bargain.

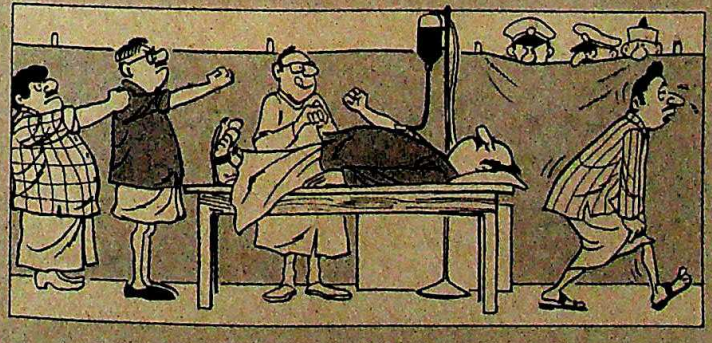
He was new to the town and for the first few days life was pure hell, as it is likely to be when your coat is pulled and you are tripped on your way to the blackboard every once in a while. It came to the point where the poor man didn't even dare to venture among the desks. Making students stand on the benches was no remedy: he rapidly ran out of benches.

And then, one day, he had one of those heaven-sent inspirations and everything changed dramatically. When the students rushed into the classroom with their usual exuberance, they were brought up short by the sight of a huge, glittering knife stuck firmly into the teacher's desk. Quietly they filed in, quietly they took out their books and, like good little children, sat at their tables. Corporal punishment may be a thing of the past, but it is a good idea to keep the rod where everybody can see it.

BLOODSUCKERS

■ The public conception of a trader works out to a fat middle-aged man, seated cross-legged on a dirty cloth, raking in the hard-earned money of starving farmers. This is too extreme a picture, they are beings of flesh and blood, as over a hundred of them proved in Trivandrum.

The prelude to the revelation was a shop-clearing drive threatened by the authorities. When revenue officials, escorted by hordes of police, arrived to seal the shops, the owners got together and kicked them out of the area. However, they realised that something more had to be done.



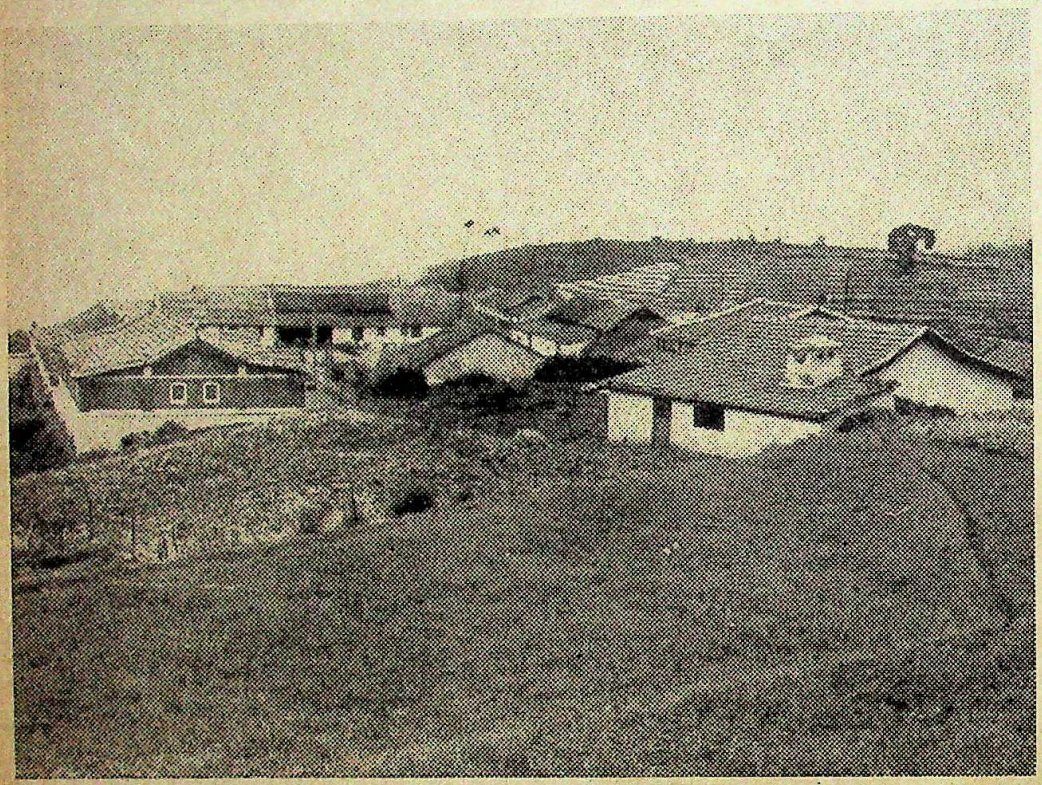
They lined up outside the blood bank of a local medical college and, one by one, rolled up their sleeves, flopped down on the tables, and let the doctors suck their blood out of them. Emotions were running high, and many a trader left looking as if he had just been to an appointment with Dracula. They made it clear that the generous donation was in protest against the plan to suck their "life-blood", but the authorities were reportedly not impressed. And one trader was heard remarking that they should have gone a little easy on the donation, as they were now too weak to resist if the revenue boys came calling again.

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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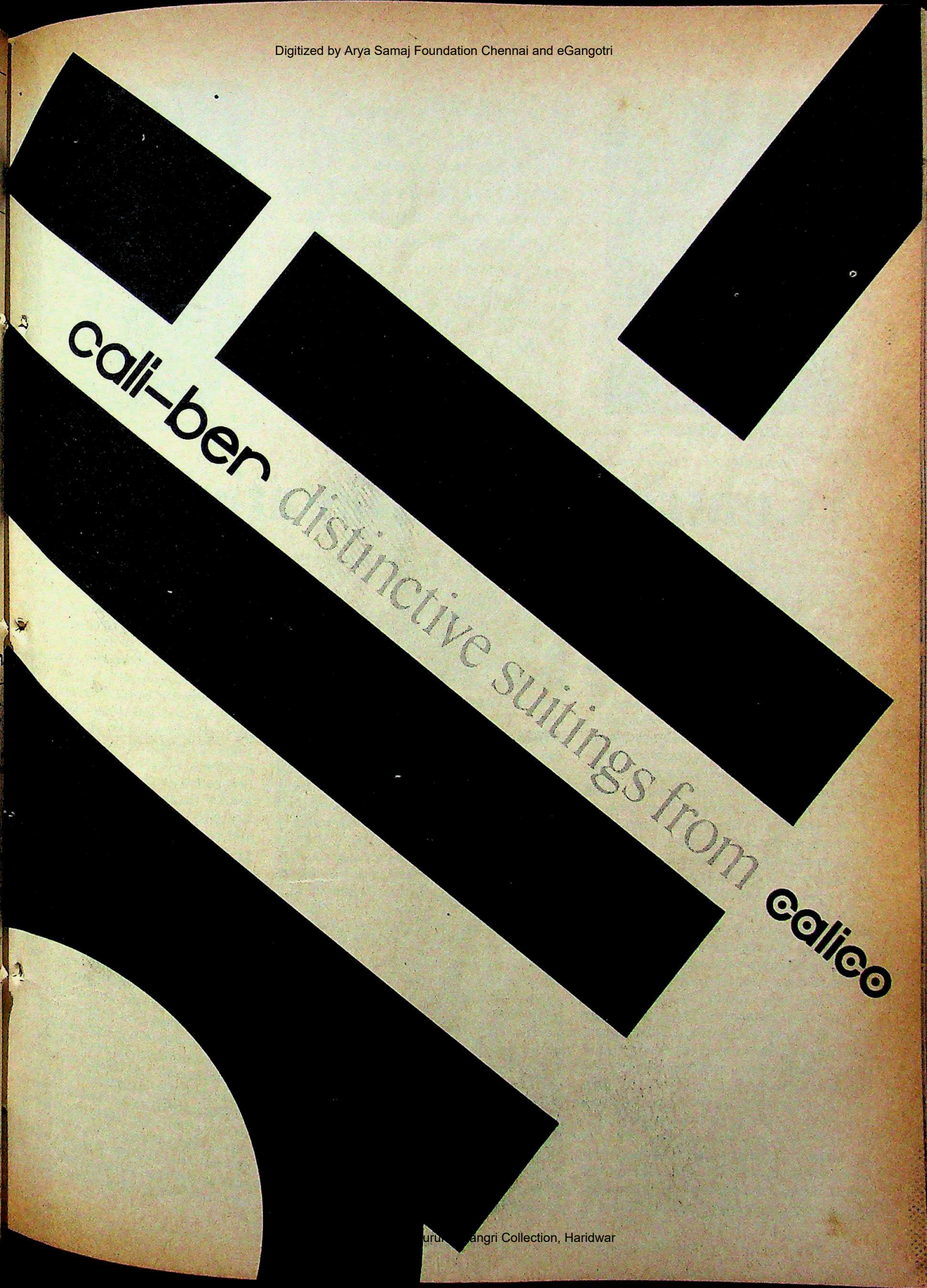
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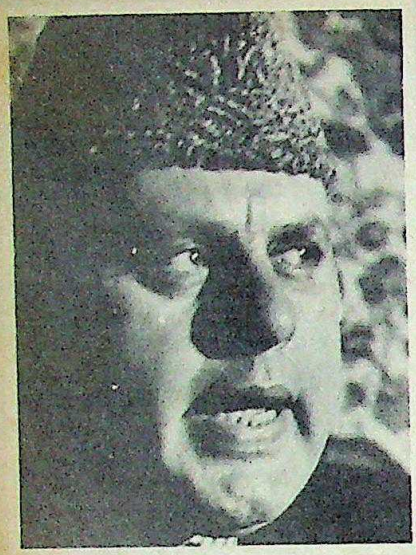
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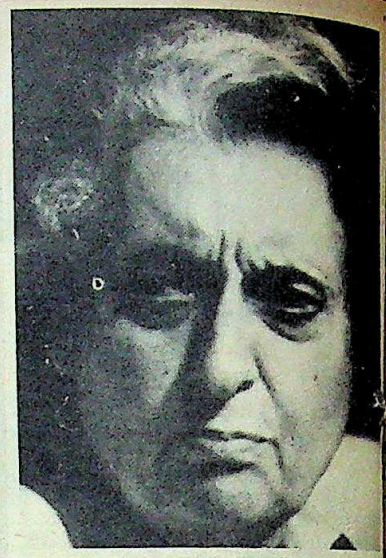


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The fifty-minute meeting was marked with mutual distrust. Mrs Gandhi repeated charges that Farooq was encouraging anti-national elements and suppressing civil liberties. Farooq countered by forcefully arguing that her lieutenants in Kashmir were hardly trustworthy.



JAMMU & KASHMIR

A Contrived Confrontation

AT LEAST politically, temperatures were still rising in the Kashmir valley last fortnight even as it shivered under the season's first snowfall. As a tired Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah returned to his winter capital of Jammu after an audience with the prime minister he brought very little cheer for his beleaguered followers looking for relief from the three-month-old, often violent Congress(I) agitation and the innuendo offensive from Delhi. The way things stood last fortnight, Delhi had still not withdrawn its fiat to the state Congress(I) unit to topple the Government. And with the National Conference (NC) Government resolved to take the Congress(I) bull by its horns, at least in the valley, the stage seemed set for a prolonged battle. Confirmed Congress(I) leader Mohammed Shafi Qureshi in Srinagar: "The agitation will continue." The objective was obviously to stir up trouble and press for the dismissal of the Government because of its failure to maintain law and order.

In a way, Farooq and his mother were seeking a reprieve as they made their conciliatory call on the prime minister. The 50-minute meeting—it was originally scheduled to last 30 minutes—did little to improve matters. Mrs Gandhi is said to have repeated charges that Farooq was encouraging anti-national elements and arguing that her Kashmiri lieutenants in Kashmir were hardly trustworthy. It ended there, and Farooq refused to comment on the meeting. The chief outcome appeared to be that they agreed to meet again sometime in the third week of January but the freeze of last year seemed to have thawed.

Earlier, a similar chill had marked Farooq's meeting with Union Home Minister P.C. Sethi who was adamant that the state Government had not done enough against the secessionists—without, of course, making any specific allegations. Said Farooq later: "The Home Ministry knows so well there is no truth in the charges. There are no specific allegations."

Vociferous Campaign: The two meetings were a logical step forward in the situation which has developed over the past three months: the state Congress(I) men trying to draw the NC into street skirmishes with party bosses in Delhi providing strong covering fire. The campaign peaked with Mrs Gandhi's outburst at the Congress(I) plenary session at Calcutta (*see* Cover Story). This was obviously the signal for her minions to tar the Farooq Government as anti-national, making vociferous demands for "Central intervention in the strategic border state". Fumed Farooq: "My question is: why did you convert the whole thing into a Farooq session? Why were you hanging me without even listening to me? This was a one-sided trial. To be fair they should have called me there itself to explain it all to them. After all, I campaigned for the Congress(I) in 1980."

Back home, Farooq was instructing his partymen to be prepared for a protracted political battle, faced as they were with both the Congress(I) onslaught and the machinations of his estranged brother-in-law Ghulam Mohammed Shah. The more immediate threat comes from the Congress(I). For three months now, Congress(I) support the valley have been taking out de trations calling for fulfilment of de that range from the dismissal of the G ment to the removal of unemployme thodically, the atmosphere of confro has been built up until, last fortnight gress(I) leaders were talking of a total down of law and order. Said state ress(I) President Mufti Mohammed S suppose the Centre should know what in such a situation. Farooq wants t the pot boiling with violence. The Indian forces are being persecuted And Syed reeled off an endless list of allegations.

Farooq dismisses these contemp ly: "The local Congress(I) leaders have mehow prove their existence. They a for it." However, one set of allegation from Mrs Gandhi herself who said, other things, that her partymen were persecuted, beaten up and jailed indi nately; their houses were being razed ground and that they were even being foodgrains on their ration cards.

Mob Fury: The climax was th gress(I) allegation of Nuremberg-typ of its supporters in Srinagar Central situation was not that desperate. The no prohibitory orders in the state. 93 Congress(I) workers were in the jail. Sixty-four of these were gran which they turned down. And the tension did not explode in street vio was apparent at Anantnag, the seco gest town in the valley, 50 km from

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where the most violent clashes between police and Congress(I) demonstrators are supposed to have taken place.

At Anantnag, it all began on December 14 when nearly 250 Congress(I) men marched in a procession to the district magistrate's office. A deputation of 10 was allowed to meet the deputy commissioner. Said Superintendent of Police Thakur Dayal Singh: "They just took out cigarette-lighters and started burning the curtains and the sofas." This is confirmed by junior employees in the office and even by some Congress(I) workers. A week later the partymen tried to ransack the district courts when those arrested on the December 14 fracas were brought for remand.

On December 22, a new situation developed at Bijbehara, nearly 18 km away, Mufti's home town. A truck, while reversing, knocked a passer-by dead. A Congress(I) mob gathered and raised slogans against the state Government's failure to protect lives and property on the state's roads and, for hours, did not even let the police pick up the body. Says Dayal Singh: "It really got rough when they extended the action to the Jammu-Srinagar national highway, stoning even army convoys and cutting the state's lifeline. And they were just about a hundred people. We arrested 22." The police resorted to a mild lathi charge, leaving about as many injured.

Loudspeaker Trouble: For the Congress(I) the greatest provocation came two days later when, they allege, a strong police force broke into the district party office, ransacked furniture and records and took away some things. The facts are slightly different. On December 24, some local Congress(I) men began delivering angry speeches abusing, among others, the late Sheikh Abdullah. The Congress(I) office in Anantnag is in Lal Chowk which is a sensitive spot with most shopkeepers politically active and the office not very far away.

In a short while rival mobs gathered outside the Congress(I) office trading abuse. Said a shopkeeper: "The violence had just begun when we saw a number of policemen enter the Congress(I) office and then disperse the crowds. The speeches suddenly stopped." The Government claims the police went in only to seize the amplifier. Said Dayal Singh: "I myself went in with a magistrate and guards. They had not taken the district administration's permission for using the loudspeaker." He adds: "There were no more than eight people inside. The rival mob could have lynched them." But, alleged Aziz, a Congress(I) supporter: "The fact is that the police had never objected to the loudspeaker in the past. We were not so badly outnumbered and it was the NC that needed police protection."

It was at Anantnag that the police first charged 29 Congress(I) men on December 14 under Section 436 of the Ranbir Penal Code for arson. Explained a government spokesman: "For trial under 436 the police have to produce the challan within a fortnight and the trial must be finished within three months. The objective was not to allow people to get away because of legal delays. But the trials are held in sessions courts."

AROUND the time trouble broke out at Anantnag, yet another battle between the police and Congress(I) demonstrators ensued at Shopian, the pretty little township nestling in the Pir Panjal ranges at the south-western edge of the valley. A stronger Congress(I) procession was attacked by the police on relatively lesser provocation. Among the pictures of his wounded partymen that Mufti dishes out to newsmen, most come from Shopian and the scars on the faces and bodies of Congress(I) men show that these are not faked. Said Shopian lawyer Riaz Hussain, vice-president of the local Congress(I) unit and a member of the PCC(I): "They fractured my nose. And late every night the police have been raiding my house for searches. My wife could not take the harassment and has gone away to her parents." He added, almost pleadingly: "You see, I am newly married."



Riaz Hussain: injured party



SHEKHAR GUPTA

Akhoon: "I would have been killed"

The Government's story, however, is that the demonstrators were throwing stones at the police. Said Abdul Khaleq Wani, deputy commissioner of the Pulwama district under which Shopian falls: "Believe me, we behaved with utmost restraint, following the Prophet's advice for never-ending patience. But they attacked us." The Congress(I) men, however, insist that the deputy commissioner is virtually an NC worker. Asked Mohammed Ahsan Tiwi, the secretary of the town Congress(I) committee: "Is he not the same officer who was thrown out of Rajauri by people for having rigged the poll in NC's favour?"

Exaggerated Tales: But if newspaper reports on the December 14 clashes were rather exaggerated, the ones on demonstrations on January 6 were grotesquely twisted. What was made out to be an all-out confrontation between the whole town and the Government was no more than the eviction of nearly 60 squatters from a Government office, when police lathis left about 10 bleeding. Claimed Abdul Majid Bandey, the tehsil Congress(I) president: "I admit that there were nearly 60 squatters. But they were in a barricaded compound when the police charged. And each one of them was injured."

In Srinagar, Mufti and his sergeants talked repeatedly of the repression at Shopian and, apparently, the burnt houses of her partymen that Mrs Gandhi spoke of were from Pulwama district. But the Congress(I) men at Shopian and Pulwama had nothing more to show than a house ransacked during the June 1983 elections. Lawyer Riaz Hussain, whose house is supposed to have been razed said he had evidence even though he had repaired the house later. His kinsmen promptly displayed a large brass tray heaped with glass slivers. "These are from the window panes the police had broken," asserted Hussain.

The story was repeated with minor variations at the distant district town of Kupwara and the lesser settlements of Tral, Bandipore and Sopore. But at the new district town of Badgam, 23 km from Srinagar, the

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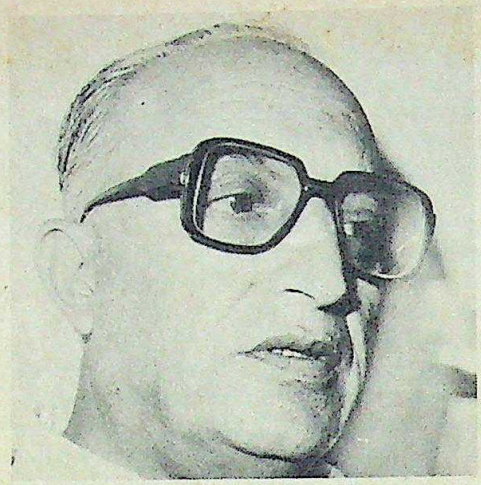
variations were significant. On December 14 about 250 Congress(I) demonstrators gathered in front of the deputy commissioner's office and demanded that a deputation be allowed to see him. Twenty people were permitted to do so. Said Deputy Commissioner Abdul Aziz Akhoon: "My policemen were outside. The demonstrators suddenly bolted the door from inside, broke my table, pulled down the chief minister's picture from the wall and some grabbed me by the collar. I would have been killed. Fortunately I broke free for a moment and fled to the toilet." He shows off the damage to his office —the broken desk, bolts, window panes, Farooq's picture and bloodstains on the walls which, he claims, were left by excited Congressmen who broke the panes with their bare hands.

Tactical Error: The Congress(I) men, however, say that the police beat up their people mercilessly inside the room and most came out bleeding. Badgam is one of the very few pro-Congress(I) pockets in the valley, mainly because of its large sprinkling of Shias. Confessed Public Prosecutor Nur Mohammed Dar in his application to the Badgam sessions judge that the 24 Congress(I) demonstrators be tried at the Srinagar Central Jail: "It may not be out of place here to state that the Congress(I) workers have a stronghold in Badgam proper that is likely to affect the conduct of the trial." The court accepted the application. At Anantnag, the sessions judge dismissed a similar application but the high court said yes.

This was the Government's greatest tactical mistake, as even its key functionaries admit. And as Law Minister P.L. Handoo followed up the transfer of trials with the statement that the transfer was necessary to prevent an unpleasant law and order situation in Badgam and Anantnag, he gave the Congress(I) the argument it was looking for. Said Mufti: "Do we need to say that law and order has broken down? Here is the law minister himself making the same admission. They are getting away with doing a Nuremberg."

Later in the fortnight, the Government tried to undo the damage: the Cabinet decided not to proceed with the trials in the Srinagar jail. Said Farooq Abdullah: "There will be no trials in jails at all. People will be tried in the courts in their own towns. We will give them all the privileges criminals are entitled to get." But some damage was done. Argued Mufti: "We are subjected to special trials for protesting democratically. But secessionists go about freely."

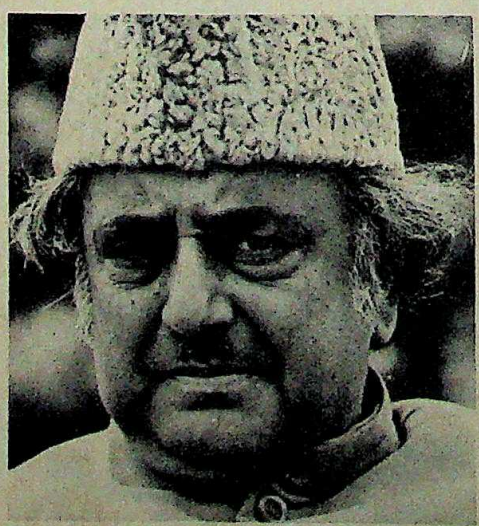
Important Charge: Encouragement of secessionists is one charge that upsets Farooq most. But the Congress(I) made no specific allegations barring the NC's alliance with *mirwaiz* Maulvi Farooq's Awami



G.M. Shah: feuding relative

Action Committee and "that bloody cricket match", to quote Farooq. On the alliance with the *mirwaiz* the NC is on firm ground as its spokesmen quote instances of national leaders, including Mrs Gandhi and Morarji Desai, courting him in the recent past. Said Mohammed Shafi: "Now he has participated in an election. He goes to Deoband and sits next to Mrs Gandhi in its centenary celebrations. What does it mean?" The Congress(I) men also allege an alliance between NC and the Jamaat-e-Islami. Said Abdul Majid Bandey of Shopian: "It is with the Government's connivance that the Jamaat has acquired control over all the mosques where they preach hatred against India in Arabic. I am a devout Muslim but, believe me, for our own good something will have to be done about these mosques."

The NC spokesmen vehemently deny the charge. Fumed Farooq: "We fought them, we defeated them so totally and yet we are called anti-national. What do we do to make them believe we are patriotic short of opening our chests and showing in writing on our hearts that we are Indian?" As for the



Mufti Syed: strong words

cricket match, he blames the Congress. "Jamaat-e-Islami was just a cover and real mischief was organised by the Congress(I). But we have got wiser now and be Rajiv's public meeting in November caught 26 Congress(I) workers with dag and acid bombs. Their names have been to the Home Ministry."

Farooq is now besieged in a way, sniping on another front growing int steady fusillade as brother-in-law G Shah plans for the NC plenary session Jammu on February 11 and 12 to "se vote of no-confidence against the pr leadership". Shah, who is known to h touch with the Congress(I), has been t to secure defections and repeats more o the same allegations as Mufti. Say "Why does Farooq treat the Congre men like wild pathans? This is a democ and not Habibullah's Afghanistan." He cuses Farooq of taking "joyrides while state is burning" and asserts: "This is a vernment of field marshals with no sol behind them. Who will win the war?" ming the support of 60 per cent partymen affirms: "Without his mother Farooq zero. He acts just like a fool, has a merc temperament and refuses to grow up." dismisses charges of having split the fa "I am not part of the Sheikh family. M the Shah family. I am just a *jamai* (so law)."

Sharp Counter: On this, for Farooq agrees. Says he angrily: "I ha relation with them. I have for long giv that family." He does not think muc Shah's threat: "He will find his Wat soon. His end will be like that of many traitors of the party." Even angrier at S allegations of administrative confusion cause of Farooq's absence from the sta pital, the chief minister said: "Inshall will reach all corners of not only my sta the country. Farooq is different. Ne Gul Shah who would remain bound t chair, sitting in his room with his *panj p* (the five faithfuls)."

Farooq will be making a mistake underestimates the Shah challenge. S government officer: "Shah now is not He has the entire Congress(I) behind And Mrs Gandhi knows she cannot i President's Rule in Jammu & Kashmir to constitutional compulsions. Farv rather new to this kind of politics." Farooq hopefully: "I don't suppose Gandhi will encourage such politics a cause the entire country to disintegrate." with the situation as fluid as it is perce of what threatens the country's in vary from politician to politician. Obv as on so many other issues, Farooq a Congress(I)'s predilections may be apart.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

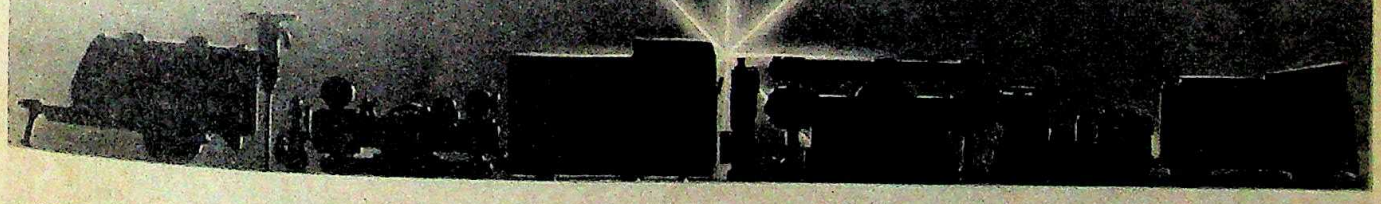
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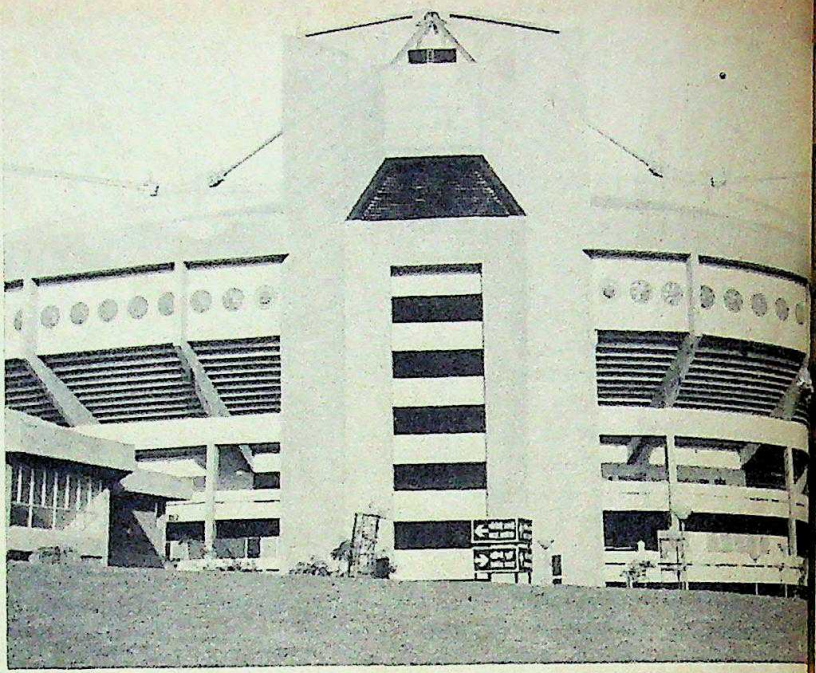
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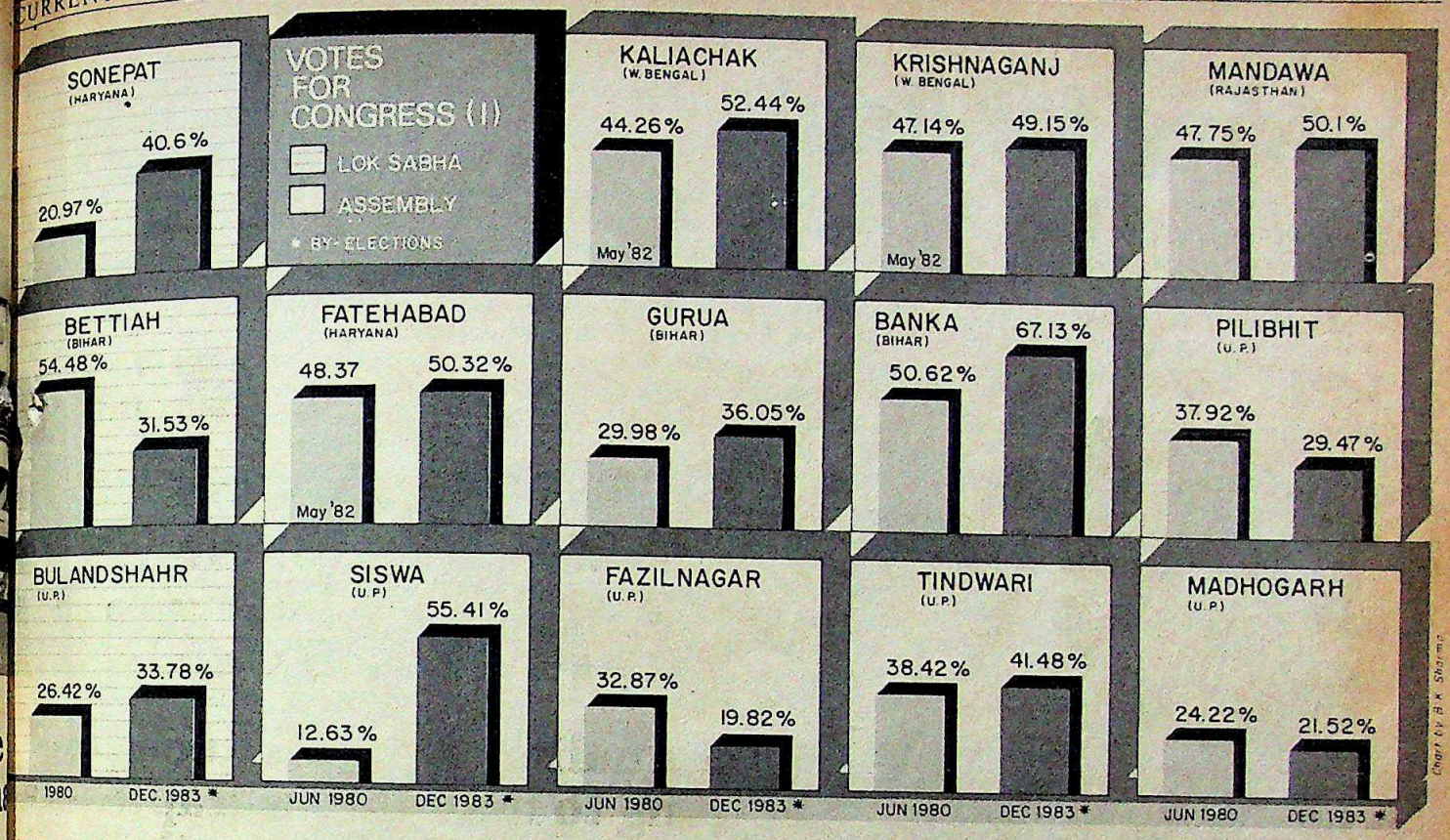
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Y-ELECTIONS

Some Comfort for Congress

CONTRARY to first impressions, last month's by-elections to 11 assembly and three Lok Sabha seats show n overall increase in the Congress(I)'s polarity compared with the last time these ats were contested in a state-wide or ation-wide election. The results contain a essage—albeit a slender one—of hope for e ruling party which improved its representation slightly (winning one Lok Sabha d eight assembly seats) but appeared to se ground in the key state of Uttar Pradesh.

Though it was trounced in the Bettiah ok Sabha poll in Bihar, its share of votes clining sharply to 31.53 per cent from 48 per cent in January 1980, its hold on sembly votes in the two constituencies pol- , rose as dramatically to 52.69 from 38.95 cent in June 1980. In Rajasthan's solitary ntest for the assembly seat at Mandawa, Congress(I) also improved its share of tes marginally to 50.1 per cent from 47.75 r cent in 1980. There was a swing of votes favour of the Congress(I) of 2.35 per cent ce 1980.

The West Bengal results were surprising more ways than one; not only did the Con- ss(I) best the CPI(M) in both constituencies, ook Kaliachak with an unusually large ange in the voting pattern. In the June 82 elections, the Congress(I) candidate there trailed the CPI(M) by 10.46 per cent of the votes cast; in December 1983 it led by 5.27 per cent, making a change in the margin of 15.74 per cent. Taking both West Bengal seats, the Congress(I) improved its share of votes to 50.87 per cent compared with 45.57 per cent in the May 1982 elections.

In Haryana, where it scored a surprise victory in the Sonepat Lok Sabha by-election, its gains were equally impressive: in the Lok Sabha contest, it took 40.6 per cent of the votes polled compared with 20.97 in January 1980 with a large swing of 19.6 per cent in its favour. The swing to the Congress(I) in the Fatehabad assembly contest was a smaller 2 per cent.

Little Indication: The Uttar Pradesh results showed a similar trend—but with a difference: the improvement was insufficient to deliver most seats to the Congress(I). The swing in favour of the Congress(I) in the Bulandshahr Lok Sabha seat of 7.4 per cent reduced the Opposition's margin of victory. In the four assembly elections, its share rose to 33 per cent from 28.12 per cent in June 1980—but the rise was insufficient to give it more than two out of the five constituencies that went to the polls. In the Pilibhit constituency the Rashtriya Sanjay Manch won with a change in the victory margin of as much as 58.98 per cent.

But the results of two of the five need qualification. In Tindwari, the Congress(I) took 38.42 per cent of the June 1980 vote, but raised this to an astonishing 89.92 per cent in the by-election in June 1981 when former chief minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh was elected. Compared with the previous by-election, therefore, the ruling party has suffered a steep reduction. In the Siswa constituency, which the Congress(I) won, the party supported the Congress(S) candidate, who joined the party immediately after, so the figure of 12.63 per cent is an inaccurate reflection of the party's popularity in the June 1980 poll.

Taking the three Lok Sabha by-elections as a whole the Congress(I) vote rose to 35.64 per cent from the 31.75 per cent garnered in the general election in these constituencies. And in the 11 assembly constituencies taken together, the ruling party pulled in 42.8 per cent of the vote compared to 37.05 per cent when these constituencies last went to the polls as part of state-wide elections.

By-elections don't necessarily provide pointers for upcoming general elections. Past experience has shown that voters behave differently during state-wide polls and isolated by-elections. At best, the results are crude wind cocks, broadly pointing which way the wind blew at the time of elections. Last month, it wasn't a wind so much as a gust, cold comfort to a party which must face the storm of a general election within a year.

—Researched by ROLI LAL

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BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY

Bracing for Battle

AT LEAST one party refuses to bank on the presumption that general elections will indeed be held next year, as scheduled. As the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) wound up its fifth national council meet at Indore early this month, the call went out to all partymen: "Be in a state of election alert."

Instructions to the 1,000 assembled delegates were very clear, on the last day—February was to be devoted to the collection of party funds. Party President Atal Behari Vajpayee outlined a target for his men, as well saying the party should conscript one crore new members, and swell its coffers by Rs 10 crore, for the election fund.

That very clear-cut action plan came in the wake of the Congress(I)'s hyped-up plenary session in Calcutta, and is evidence that BJP is not going to take the ruling party's challenge passively. In fact, both the political and economic resolutions issued at the council session made reference to the Congress(I) meet and devoted almost a third of their space to hit back at its claims and allegations.

But ironically, what got the BJP headlines was the uneasy alliance the party has made with the ruling Janata Party in Karnataka. Although the BJP's 18 members in the state Assembly help Ramakrishna Hegde's Government maintain a crucial wafer-thin majority, things are obviously not well between the partners. And state party President B.B. Shivappa, along with the leader of its legislature party, V.S. Acharya, thought the council session an excellent opportunity to express their disenchantment with the Janata Party.

Disloyalty: To the increasing indignation of their colleagues, they pointed out instance after instance of injustice by the Janata. They charged that in both the municipal elections at Shimoga and Udupi, held last year, the ruling party in the state had ganged up with the Congress(I), betraying their duty by the BJP. In Doddaballapur municipality where the BJP is in power, they claimed the Janata was hampering its working; in Karkala they had sabotaged the BJP's chances during the civic elections, and even during the elections to the cooperative societies in the state, the Government was using its power to nominate members in various places in order to weaken the BJP. Finally, they also alleged that in major issues such as the hike in bus fares or prices of milk and electricity, the Government did not bother to consult them. Said a bitter Acharya: "They take all the credit for achievements and push all the failures on to us."

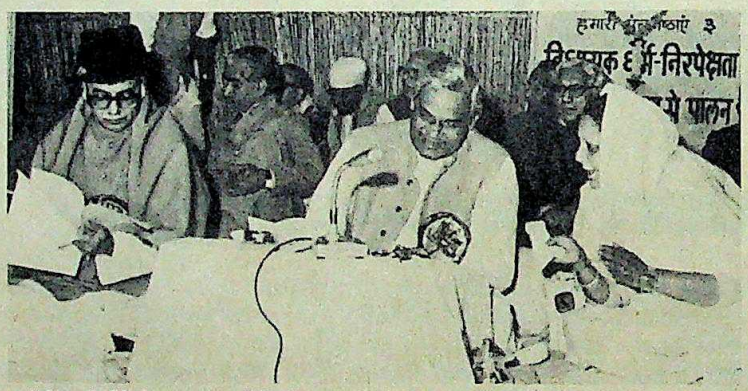
But the party's anger at the Janata will probably not find release. If the BJP turns against the ruling party in Karnataka, it will amount to serving the beleaguered Government practically on a platter to their bigger enemy, the Congress(I). On the other hand, it is crucial that the BJP stick with the Janata, in view of the general elections. Explains L.K. Advani, party general secretary: "The common man is wary of coalitions, and we want to show through Karnataka that they are possible. Which is why we will continue to support the Janata Party."

Coalition is the keyword at the party today, a sense of realism having tempered its earlier cocky optimism. At its first national study camp held in Uttar Pradesh in 1981, the party believed it was well on its way to establishing itself as the "only national alternative". It also predicted, rather too confidently, that in the 1985 elections, it could win as many as 243 Lok Sabha seats. At Indore, Vajpayee confessed to his fellow-partymen that the expected big leap forward had not happened. But he added that the party's progress although not satisfactory, had still given them reason for "enthusiasm". Said he: "We also know our limitations. The BJP cannot alone replace the Congress(I). But in the country's interests, we have to remove Mrs Gandhi. If we can't do it alone, we are willing to do it with like-minded parties."

Heavy Criticism: Taking on its favourite bugbear, the Congress(I), the BJP lashed out in a resolution: "If today the country's unity has really become imperilled by disturbing developments in... Assam, in Punjab or in Jammu & Kashmir, the blame lies squarely on the ruling party which has been inclined to take all decisions purely from the point of political and electoral advantage, unmi... even of national interest."

Even on the economic front, the re... tion ridiculed Congress(I) claims, par... larly that which said 12 crore people... been lifted over the poverty line. Bhai M... vir, MP, and one of those who had draft... resolution sneered at other claims abou... sufficiency in foodgrains and the u... scientific talent as well: "The ruling ... appears to have closed its eyes to reali... each case, it increasingly resorts to se... refuge behind false claims." As part... election strategy, the BJP plans to draw... charge-sheet documenting all the ... gress(I) Government's lapses.

But the resolution took a hard lo... other issues as well, and on the Assam... blem for the first time it conditionally c... sed the acceptance of 1971 as the cut-off... for the identification of foreigners. It a... ved the setting up of the tribunals, but d... red the fact that they were not of the p... sed number, and also that for one rea... another, they hadn't ... work yet. It also called f... amendment to the provisi... garding objections to be ... by local Assamese. Cl... party Vice-President S.S. ... dari: "Ideally the Gover... should (detect the forei... but since it cannot be trus... respect the letter of th... public involvement is nec... But if a limit of 3 km is pl... lot of people won't have t... urage to report names in ... dominated by foreigners."



Advani, Vajpayee and Rajmata Scindia at the meet: rallying round

Election Plans: On ... jab, the resolution lashed out at the ... Dal, making it quite clear that it would ... no truck with that party in the comin... tions. Said Advani: "If the principal g... with the Government, the Akalis are ... of compounding the problem."

All through the session, party ... felt constantly called upon to reassur... colleagues about the party's failure to ... re a single seat in the recent by-ele... While the party generally conceded th... results have not been up to expecta... Bhandari added hopefully: "In by-ele... issues tend to be localised, which is n... the general elections."

But an amusing sidelight to the ... was the BJP's total acceptance of politi... lity—and the personality cult: at a st... side the convention hall, "square ... with Atalji photo (in colour)" were ... for Rs 125 per 100 pieces. Rashtriy... amsewak Sangh conservatives undo... frown at this build-up, but if Mrs G... charisma can sell, why not Atalji's ...

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

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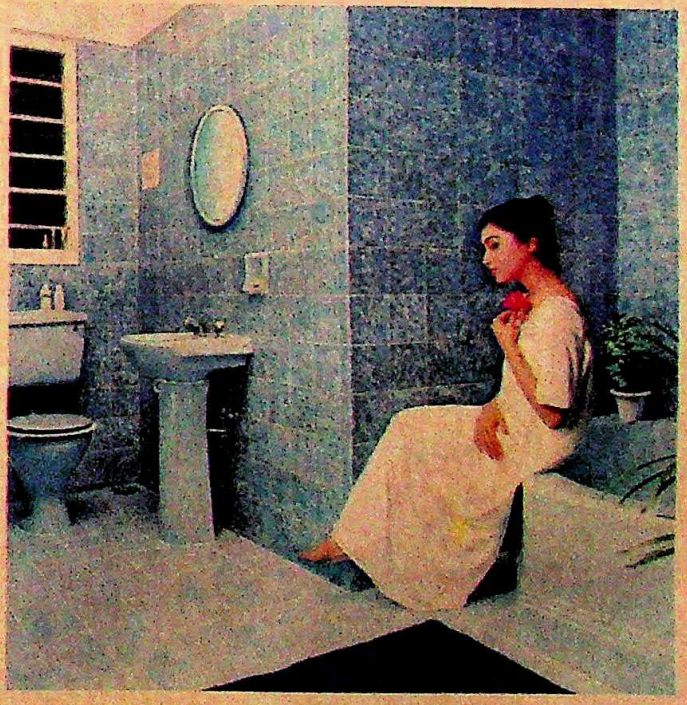
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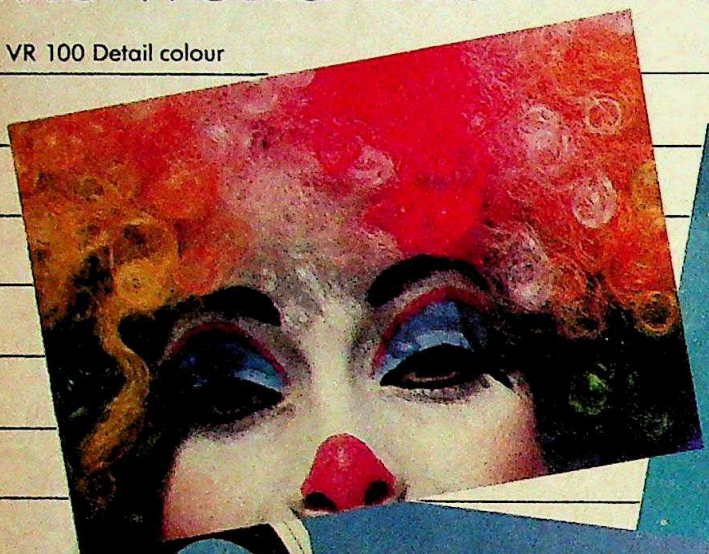
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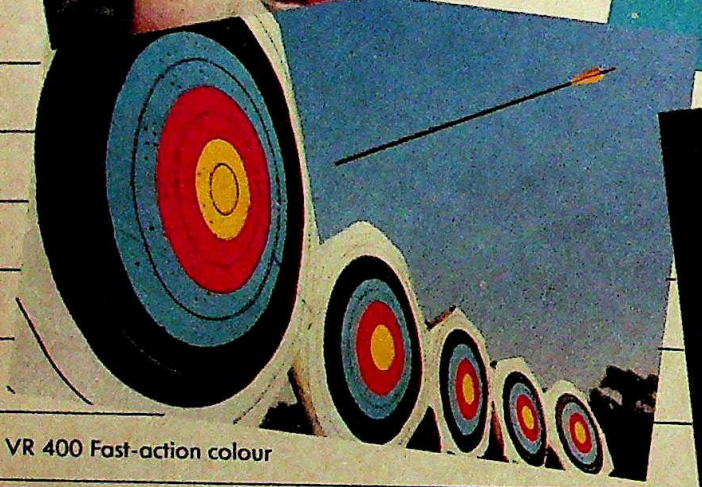
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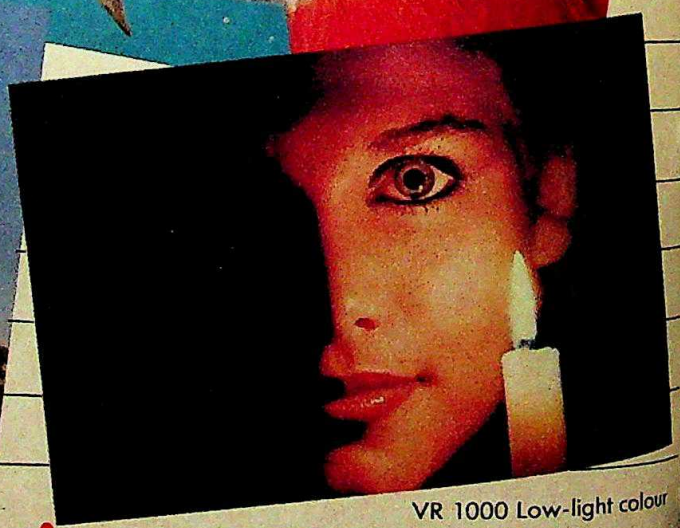


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LOK DAL

Surviving the Strains

WHEN the Lok Dal got mauled in the December by-elections it looked as if its six-month-old alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was about to end up on the rocks. Critics of the alliance, who had never been reconciled to the idea of teaming up with the BJP seized the opportunity to question the wisdom of the move. Added to this came pressures from outside the party as attractive offers began pouring in from opposition leaders still in search of an election winning combination.

But last fortnight it appeared that Lok Dal leader Charan Singh had firmly made up his mind to keep the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) intact and ignore the rumblings in his party and the tempting offers that were coming his way. An executive committee meeting—the first after the poll drubbing—came out unequivocally in favour of continuing the alliance. More than a dozen speakers, including some losers in last month's poll came out strongly for the alliance. Some like Chandra Paul Sarlani, an MP from Uttar Pradesh and Kanwal Singh, the Haryana Lok Dal chief went to great lengths to defend the NDA and requested executive members to work energetically to strengthen the alliance. They even went to the extent of requesting Charan Singh to discontinue talks with other parties as it would create unnecessary suspicion and uncertainty among middle level leaders and workers.

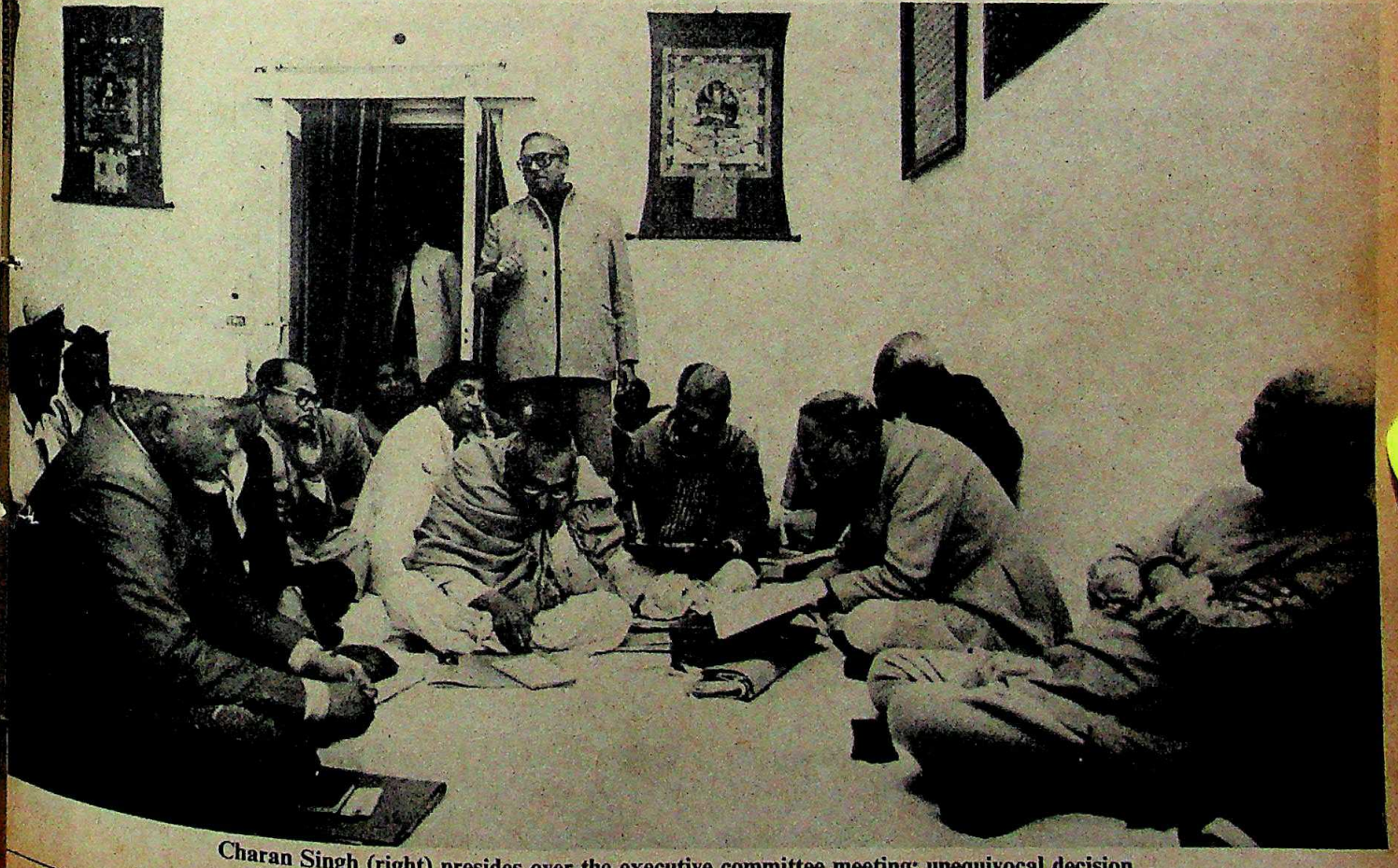
Harsh Criticism: The executive committee resolution did little to scotch the flow of criticism which was let loose after election results became known. The opponents of the alliance within the Lok Dal, led by Rajya Sabha MP Satya Pal Mallik let it be known that they saw no point in continuing the alliance. Said one Lok Dal MP: "If Charan Singh doesn't sever his ties with the BJP, his party is going to be unpopular with the voters."

Other opponents of the alliance openly blamed the BJP for the defeat. They pointed out that the Lok Dal had lost ground in the elections dropping two Lok Sabha seats and three out of five assembly seats. And while the party wrested a seat from the ruling party in Uttar Pradesh, it lost the prestigious Bulandshahr Lok Sabha seat to the Janata's Banarsi Das who was considered a rank outsider before the contest took place. Worse still, in Sonepat, thought to be a Lok Dal bastion, the party finished a poor third. Charan Singh was forced to swallow the humiliation of seeing the Congress(I) seize the seat while his arch rival Devi Lal finished a close second.

Mallik claimed that the BJP had very clearly failed to pull its weight. He said in Bulandshar, which was held by the Lok Dal in 1980, the party candidate Sarwar Hussain could have got more than the 72,299 votes he polled if the BJP had supported him whole heartedly. Similarly in Sonepat the BJP appeared to have failed to transfer its votes to the Lok Dal candidate.

Stern Measures: Stung by the persistent criticism, Charan Singh finally retaliated by expelling Mallik from the party for six years. Mallik was accused of sabotaging the party's election prospects and also of hob-nobbing with Congress(I) leaders. He denied the allegations levelled against him and blamed the BJP lobby in the party for misguiding the party chief. He had also predicted that the Lok Dal would come a cropper in the polls if it stayed with the BJP.

The campaign from outside to break the NDA also inevitably stepped up as opposition leaders grasped the lessons of the December poll. One merger proposal came from no other than Devi Lal who offered Charan Singh the presidentship of a new united party



Charan Singh (right) presides over the executive committee meeting: unequivocal decision

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which would include all the constituents of the United Front. Since the BJP has politely turned down Charan Singh's suggestion that the BJP and the Lok Dal should merge there were many who hoped that he might respond favourably to the suggestion.

Predictable Mores: From another direction the Janata Party's irrepressible Raj Narain who still remains close to Charan Singh—he once described himself as Charan Singh's Hanuman—made desperate attempts to break up the NDA. The new efforts in the wake of the elections were predictable. Already over the last few months feelers have gone out periodically to Charan Singh from a host of senior political leaders including Biju Patnaik, George Fernandes and Karpoori Thakur amongst others. Janata Party President Chandra Shekhar has also gone on record to predict that the NDA would collapse within three months.

The NDA has survived despite these dire predictions though there have been strains. At one point Lok Dal members petitioned Charan Singh saying that the party's association with the BJP would erode his base among the Muslims. Charan Singh did not seem inclined to heed their complaints. The December debacle has also been explained away. Says Ram Naresh Yadav, former Uttar Pradesh chief minister and Lok Dal secretary: "Our defeat in Sonepat was mainly due to organisational weaknesses and the vicious propaganda carried out by Devi Lal. In Bulandshahr we refrained from making it a communal issue but our opponents played the dangerous game of playing one community against the other to win the elections." There is no doubt that the party's stand is inspired more by self-interest than any love for the BJP. But Lok Dal leaders say that Charan Singh hopes to expand his urban base and also finds it easier to work with a party whose leaders are able to command the allegiance of its followers.

Moreover if the Lok Dal tries to strike any other deals it is going to have to give away some seats in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar which its followers are loathe to do. The BJP has been undemanding on this score and agreed to contest only those seats in which its candidates either won or were second to the Congress in the 1980 parliamentary poll. According to tentative proposals the Lok Dal will contest about 99 of the 139 seats in the two states. And if Charan Singh withdraws from the NDA he will have to face charges that he switches allegiances according to convenience. Says S.P. Gautam, Lok Dal treasurer: "Come what may, BJP-Lok Dal alliance is going to stay. Vajpayee and Charan Singh will fight together in the next parliamentary poll." And once again, as it has been so often before, the ball is back in Charan Singh's court.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

PUNJAB

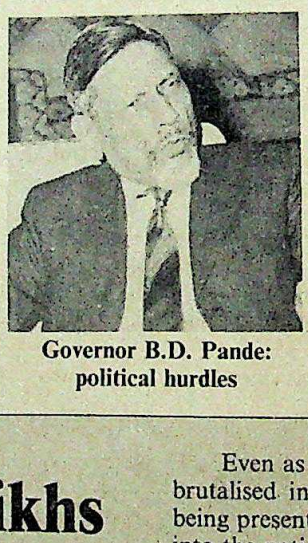
Chaos Continues

PUNJAB continues to limp on in confusion. Top police officers in the state reeled off a battery of figures last fortnight to show how successful they had been in rounding up criminals during the past month. But comprehensive crime statistics for the last quarter of the year—the first period of President's Rule—tell a different story.

On New Year's Eve, Punjab police supremo Pritam Singh Bhindar claimed that he had busted a major gun-running racket, thus crippling the terrorists. But within hours, the terrorists gave their answer in blood. In the busy market of Sultanpur Lodhi in Kapurthala district, they gunned down patrolling policemen, Inspector Bhagwan Singh and his armed escort Surinder Singh and walked off with the booty—a Sten gun and a revolver.

Police Successes: Nevertheless, there was certainly some substance in the police claims. They made 39 arrests in three months of President's Rule. Nine others were killed in police encounters and among the 213 weapons seized were seven rifles, 12 revolvers, 175 pistols and three HE ordnance-made hand-grenades. They nabbed three alleged terrorists dressed as Nihangs from the Amritsar railway station. According to Bhindar, the three had been involved in three murders, 42 robberies and large-scale smuggling, and had been using the Golden Temple as a hideout.

Also to the credit of the police are the arrests of Manvinderpal Singh, Harjinder Singh, Amrik Singh and Nirmal Singh from Patiala and Sangrur. Nirmal Singh and two others arrested are said to have confessed to the recent murders of Dr Balbir Singh, a Bharatiya Janata Party leader, Lala Jagat Narain, and R.C. Goel, a fertiliser dealer. Besides, over 3,000 petty criminals, smugglers and bootleggers were held in a statewide sweep. "We want to destroy the hideouts and accomplices of the terrorists," said Bhindar.



Governor B.D. Pande: political hurdles

But there is no escaping the fact that during the last quarter, 142 cases associated with terrorists have been registered against 86 in the previous quarter, and 25 were killed against 25. Robberies—including those of the terrorists' favourite banks—have risen four-fold, from 16 to 65. There was no let-up in instances

DELHI

Feuding Sikhs

AS THE confrontation between the feuding Sikh sants, Longowal and Bhindranwale, grew militantly intractable in Amritsar's Golden Temple, its reverberations rocked the capital all of last fortnight. On New Year's Day, when a 23-year-old army recruit-turned-terrorist Sukhdev Singh was nabbed by the Delhi police in a daring shoot-out near Connaught Place, it turned out that he was not only responsible for a Rs 20 lakh jewellery heist in the capital in late November, but that he had strong links with terrorist gangs resident in Guru Nanak Niwas and Guru Ram Dass Sarai in the Golden Temple. While Sukhdev Singh's day by day revelations—of receiving arms and arms training there, of meeting Sant Bhindranwale more than once and being witness to planned terrorist operations by Sikh extremists—hit the headlines, the *Indian Express* claimed that the prime minister had personally ordered the Delhi police to keep her informed of further details.

Even as Sukhdev Singh, sufficiently brutalised in the police lock-up before being presented in court, was catapulted into the national spotlight, Sikh trouble of another kind broke out at Gurudwara Rakabganj in the city. Akali factions belonging to the Longowal and Master Tara Singh groups turned militant at a religious function celebrating the birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh on January 10. Firing shots in the air, drawing swords and pelting stones, the two groups, led by H.S. Manchanda, president of the Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Management Committee (DSGMC) who belongs to the Tara Singh group and its General Secretary Sucha Singh, who represents Longowal, fell upon each other. Over a dozen people were injured, including seven policemen, and Manchanda's car was gutted when, together with his supporters, he fled into the gurudwara manager's house nearby.

While the police was prepared for such an eventuality, they abstained from taking direct action and attempted to defuse the hostility through the effort of Sikh plainclothesmen planted in the crowd. But for the second time in the fort-

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sacrilege. And the grisly bus murders that precipitated Darbara Singh's fall were repeated with chilling ease.

Says G. Jagathpathi, advisor to the governor: "I don't blame the police which have been messed about with in so many ways over the years. They lack proper training and equipment. But we shall surely correct the trend." Governor B.D. Pande says: "We are trying to put in concerted team effort."

Beleaguered Administration: But while everyone in Chandigarh seems aware of the abysmally low morale of the police force, the governor and his advisors are struggling to rectify the situation as well as deal with other irritants which, however minor or major, are quite outside the experience of the veteran bureaucrats. For they have suddenly found themselves the targets of both pen-wielding journalists and speech-spouting politicians. What particularly irks the beleaguered administrators is the way the powers that were in the Punjab Congress(I) are making things difficult for them.

Pande says: "It is a political problem and the solution lay with political leaders. At our level, we are trying to do our best." But the erstwhile chief whip of the Congress(I) legislature party, Birdevinder Singh, says: "The sooner we turn to popular rule, the better it is." G.S. Nihalsinghwala, a Congress(I) member of the Lok Sabha, says that "neither the governor nor his advisors know Punjab and the bureaucracy is having a heyday." He complains that now the district-level administration is so overawed by Akalis that they show scant regard for Congress(I) MLA's and MP's.

What piques the former ruling party is Pande's apolitical stance. "Pande is an honest and impartial person. This is having some effect downwards too and since the Congress(I) could not rule, we are happy with the present governor," says Akali leader Basant Singh Khalsa. Leaders of the CPI and the CPI(M) also share this view.

Congress(I) leaders meanwhile bring up allegations against the present administration. In his meeting with Mrs Gandhi and Home Minister P.C. Sethi, former chief minister Darbara Singh spoke of the lack of any "discernible improvement" after his ouster.

Jasdev Singh Jassowal, a Congress(I) legislator says: "At several levels, the police are getting involved and no one is safe in such a situation." One former MLA described how the police informed a criminal group that the MLA had told the police about their hidden arsenal, putting his life in danger.

Political Allegations: Harchand Singh Hero, chairman of the apex cooperative body, Markfed, who had earlier left the Akali Dal to join the Congress(I), recently protested to Rajiv Gandhi that at the behest of his secretary, Rajan Kashyap, Pande had divested him of all executive power. Other Congress(I) leaders who chair public sector corporations also fear that they will be ousted.

A number of politicians have another major grievance. They criticise the way the governor's advisors attend lavish receptions when they visit districts for first-hand surveys. "They hold durbars in Mughal style, and all district level officers are collected to pay obeisance. Sumptuous lunches and dinners are held. When the state does not have enough money in its coffers to pay for the salary of its staff, why indulge in this extravagance?" asks Balwinder Singh Bhunder, an Akali leader.

However, there is a broad silver lining. With Pande in the chair, a political settlement is unlikely to be sabotaged. Even the Akalis agree that there are no more fake encounters. In Chandigarh, the major threat to successful negotiations is perceived as coming from Delhi.

Both the Akali leadership and the administration were upset over Mrs Gandhi's recent statement in Patna that the Centre has nothing to do with the Akali demands as the problem has been solved and there was only individual terrorism in Punjab. The statement has been particularly frustrating for those who are trying to work out a settlement before the militant movement that is to be renewed on January 27. Says the moderate Akali leader, Prakash Singh Badal: "This statement stunned everybody. And Mrs Gandhi is only determined to push us to the wall. I do not really know what turn the morcha might take." —GOBIND THUKRAL



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Sukhdev Singh escorted by policemen: national spotlight

night, all attention was focussed on incidents concerning Sikh politics. And in both episodes, it turned out, the ruling party by manipulation or chance, stood to gain. Though Sukhdev Singh's revelations were vastly magnified by the media, closer scrutiny suggested that there was little in his evidence that the Central or state governments did not already know. Many of the "confessions" extracted by the Delhi police were either vague or well-established truths.

Innocuous Revelations: For instance, it is hardly earth-shaking knowledge to be told two years after the Akali agitation has preoccupied the mind of the Government, that the guest-houses bordering the Golden Temple are bristling with weapons or that arms training is given to novices among the extremists. Nor are the names Sukhdev gave out of known Bhindranwale henchmen like Dalbir Singh and Swaran Singh, from whom he obtained arms, unknown to the Punjab police. In fact, the terrific publicity given to his revelations was widely construed as an attempt by the top police brass in the capital to upstage their old chief and rival Pritam Singh Bhindar, now heading the anti-terrorist operation in Punjab with little success.

In fact, officers investigating Sukhdev Singh later seemed positively embarrassed by the media blitz surrounding the event. While one senior official suggested that his revelations had been blown out of proportion because of "such sensational crimes occurring in the capital", another claimed that the local press has vastly exaggerated the disclosures, especially those pertaining to his links with Sikh extremists. "If Sukhdev Singh had been caught in Punjab, there would have hardly been the kind of stir his arrest has caused in Delhi," said one senior official involved in the investigation.

Whatever the case, the fact remained that the Centre subtly made political capital out of the incident. Unable to resist the opportunity of seizing upon the "confessions", whatever their worth, it found a ready-made bait at its doorstep for the Akalis. A few days later, it scored again with the Akali factions turning violent at the Gurudwara Rakabganj function. As public opinion slowly built up in the capital against the Akali leadership, it was clear that the gulf between the Sikh leaders was becoming irreparable. In the bargain, the ruling party was closer to attaining its twin aims of discrediting the Akalis by getting them to get at each other. —SUNIL SETHI

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How much time you can sp nd i on a journey to Eu ope

to \ from	Abidjan	Abu Dhabi	Accra	Alger	Amman	Ankara	Annaba	Baghdad	Bangkok	Beijing	Beirut	Bombay	Boston	Buenos Aires	Cairo	Casablanca	Chicago	Colombo	Dakar	Damascus	Dar es Salaam	Dhahran	Douala	Dubai
Amsterdam	7.00	9.30	8.45	3.15	9.15	5.55	3.10	6.55	16.00	21.15	5.35	11.00	8.35	15.35	5.40	4.10	11.35	12.20	6.40	8.05	12.25	7.45	7.20	9.50
Athina	8.10	10.40	9.55	4.25	10.25	7.00	4.20	8.00	11.05	16.15	6.40	7.30	9.40	16.45	6.50	5.20	12.40	13.25	7.50	2.35	13.30	8.50	8.30	10.55
Barcelona	6.55	9.25	8.40	3.10	9.10	6.05	3.05	7.05	16.10	21.25	5.40	10.55	8.45	15.30	5.35	4.05	11.45	12.30	6.35	8.00	12.35	7.55	7.15	10.00
Basel	6.15	8.45	8.00	2.30	8.30	4.55	2.25	5.55	15.00	20.15	4.35	10.00	7.35	14.50	4.50	3.25	10.35	11.20	5.55	7.20	11.25	6.45	6.35	8.50
Beograd	8.55	10.50	10.30	4.35	11.05	6.55	4.55	7.55	17.00	22.15	6.35	12.00	9.35	17.20	6.50	5.55	12.35	13.20	8.30	10.00	13.25	8.45	9.10	10.50
Bruxelles	6.50	9.20	8.35	3.05	9.05	5.35	3.00	6.35	15.40	20.55	5.15	10.40	8.15	15.25	5.30	4.00	11.15	12.00	6.30	7.55	12.05	7.25	7.10	9.30
Bucureşti	8.40	10.35	10.15	4.20	10.50	6.40	4.40	7.40	16.45	22.00	6.20	11.45	9.20	17.05	6.35	5.40	12.20	13.05	8.15	9.45	13.10	8.30	8.55	10.35
Budapest	7.55	9.50	9.30	3.35	10.05	5.55	3.55	6.55	16.00	21.15	5.35	11.00	8.35	16.20	5.50	4.55	11.35	12.20	7.30	9.00	12.25	7.45	8.10	9.50
Dublin	8.40	10.35	10.15	4.20	10.50	6.40	4.40	7.40	16.45	22.00	6.20	11.45	9.20	17.05	6.35	5.40	12.20	13.05	8.15	9.45	13.10	8.30	8.55	10.35
Düsseldorf	6.50	9.20	8.35	3.05	9.05	5.35	3.00	6.35	15.40	20.55	5.15	10.40	8.15	15.25	5.30	4.00	11.15	12.00	6.30	7.55	12.05	7.25	7.10	9.30
Frankfurt	6.50	9.20	8.35	3.05	9.05	5.25	3.00	6.25	15.30	20.45	5.05	10.30	8.05	15.25	5.20	4.00	11.05	11.50	6.30	7.55	11.55	7.15	7.10	9.20
Genève	5.35	8.05	7.20	1.50	7.50	5.05	1.45	6.05	15.10	20.30	4.20	9.35	7.45	14.10	4.15	2.45	10.45	11.30	5.15	6.40	11.35	6.55	5.55	9.00
Genova	7.25	9.20	9.00	3.05	9.35	5.25	3.25	6.25	15.30	20.45	5.05	10.30	8.05	15.50	5.20	4.25	11.05	11.50	7.00	8.30	11.55	7.15	7.40	9.20
Hamburg	7.45	9.40	9.20	3.25	9.55	5.45	3.45	6.45	15.50	21.05	5.25	10.50	8.25	16.10	5.40	4.45	11.25	12.10	7.20	8.50	12.15	7.35	8.00	9.40
Hannover	8.20	10.15	9.55	4.00	10.30	6.20	4.20	7.20	16.25	21.40	6.00	11.25	9.00	16.45	6.15	5.20	12.00	12.45	7.55	9.25	12.50	8.10	8.25	10.15
Helsinki	10.15	12.10	11.50	5.55	12.25	8.15	6.15	9.15	18.20	23.35	7.55	13.20	10.55	18.40	8.10	7.15	13.55	14.40	9.50	11.20	14.45	10.05	10.30	12.10
Istanbul	9.10	11.05	10.45	4.50	11.20	7.10	5.10	8.10	17.15	22.30	6.50	12.15	9.50	17.35	7.05	6.10	12.50	13.35	8.45	10.15	13.40	9.00	9.25	11.05
København	7.35	10.05	9.20	3.50	9.50	6.10	3.45	7.10	16.15	21.30	5.50	11.15	8.50	16.10	6.05	4.45	11.50	12.35	7.15	8.40	12.40	8.00	7.55	10.05
Köln	7.35	9.30	9.10	3.15	9.45	5.35	3.35	6.35	15.40	20.55	5.15	10.40	8.15	16.00	5.30	4.35	11.15	12.00	7.10	8.40	12.05	7.25	7.50	9.30
Linz	8.05	10.00	9.40	3.45	10.15	6.05	4.05	7.05	16.10	21.25	5.45	11.10	8.45	16.30	6.00	5.05	11.45	12.30	7.40	9.10	12.35	7.55	8.20	10.00
Lisboa	9.10	11.05	10.45	4.50	11.20	7.10	5.10	8.10	17.15	22.30	6.50	12.15	9.50	17.35	7.05	6.10	12.50	13.35	8.45	10.15	13.40	9.00	9.25	11.05
London	7.10	9.40	8.55	3.25	9.25	6.10	3.20	7.10	16.15	21.30	5.50	11.10	8.50	15.45	5.50	4.20	11.50	12.35	6.50	8.15	12.40	8.00	7.30	10.05
Madrid	7.25	9.55	9.10	3.40	9.40	6.40	3.35	7.40	16.45	22.00	6.10	11.25	9.20	16.00	6.05	4.35	12.20	13.05	7.05	8.30	13.10	8.30	7.45	10.35
Málaga	8.00	10.30	9.45	4.15	10.15	7.30	4.10	8.30	17.35	22.55	6.45	12.00	10.10	16.35	6.40	5.10	13.10	13.55	7.40	9.05	14.00	9.20	8.20	11.25
Manchester	8.20	10.15	9.55	4.00	10.30	6.20	4.20	7.20	16.25	21.40	6.00	11.25	9.00	16.45	6.15	5.20	12.00	12.45	7.55	9.25	12.50	8.10	8.35	10.15
Marseille	6.30	9.00	8.15	2.45	8.45	6.00	2.40	7.00	16.05	21.25	5.15	10.30	8.40	15.05	5.10	3.40	11.40	12.25	6.10	7.35	12.30	7.50	6.50	9.55
Milano	6.30	9.00	8.15	2.45	8.45	5.15	2.40	6.15	15.20	20.35	4.55	10.20	7.55	15.05	5.10	3.40	10.55	11.40	6.10	7.35	11.45	7.05	6.50	9.10
Moskva	9.55	11.50	11.30	5.35	12.05	7.55	5.55	8.55	18.00	23.15	7.35	13.00	10.35	18.20	7.50	6.55	13.35	14.20	9.30	11.00	14.25	9.45	10.10	11.50
München	7.15	9.10	8.50	2.55	9.25	5.15	3.15	6.15	15.20	20.35	4.55	10.20	7.55	15.40	5.10	4.15	10.55	11.40	6.50	8.20	11.45	7.05	7.30	9.10
Nice	6.30	9.00	8.15	2.45	8.45	5.30	2.40	6.30	15.35	20.50	5.10	10.30	8.10	15.05	5.10	3.40	11.10	11.55	6.10	7.35	12.00	7.20	6.50	9.25
Nürnberg	7.35	9.30	9.10	3.15	9.45	5.35	3.35	6.35	15.40	20.55	5.15	10.40	8.15	16.00	5.30	4.35	11.15	12.00	7.10	8.40	12.05	7.25	7.50	9.30
Oslo	9.10	11.40	10.55	5.25	11.25	8.40	5.20	9.40	18.45	24.05	7.55	13.10	11.20	17.45	7.50	6.20	14.20	15.05	8.50	10.15	15.10	10.30	9.30	12.35
Palma de Mall.	8.10	10.05	9.45	3.50	10.20	6.10	4.10	7.10	16.15	21.30	5.50	11.15	8.50	16.35	6.05	5.10	11.50	12.35	7.45	9.15	12.40	8.00	8.25	10.05
Paris	6.40	9.10	8.25	2.55	8.55	5.40	2.50	6.40	15.45	21.00	5.20	10.40	8.20	15.15	5.20	3.50	11.20	12.05	6.20	7.45	12.10	7.30	7.00	9.35
Porto	7.55	10.25	9.40	4.10	10.10	7.25	4.05	8.25	17.30	22.50	6.40	11.55	10.05	16.30	6.35	5.05	13.05	13.50	7.35	9.00	13.55	9.15	8.15	11.20
Praha	7.35	9.30	9.10	3.15	9.45	5.35	3.35	6.35	15.40	20.55	5.15	10.40	8.15	16.00	5.30	4.35	11.15	12.00	7.10	8.40	12.05	7.25	7.50	9.30
Roma	7.05	9.35	8.50	3.20	9.20	4.45	3.15	6.45	15.50	21.05	5.25	10.50	8.25	16.10	5.40	4.15	11.25	12.10	6.45	8.10	12.15	7.35	7.25	9.40
Salzburg	7.15	9.10	8.50	2.55	9.25	5.15	3.15	6.15	15.20	20.35	4.55	10.20	7.55	15.40	5.10	4.15	10.55	11.40	6.50	8.20	11.45	7.05	7.30	9.10
Sofia	8.40	10.35	10.15	4.20	10.50	6.40	4.40	7.40	16.45	22.00	6.20	11.45	9.20	17.05	6.35	5.40	12.20	13.05	8.15	9.45	13.10	8.30	8.55	10.35
Stockholm	8.50	10.45	10.25	4.30	11.00	6.50	4.50	7.50	16.55	22.10	6.30	11.55	9.30	17.15	6.45	5.50	12.30	13.15	8.25	9.55	13.20	8.40	9.05	10.45
Stuttgart	7.05	9.00	8.40	2.45	9.15	5.05	3.05	6.05	15.10	20.25	4.45	10.10	7.45	15.30	5.00	4.05	10.45	11.30	6.40	8.10	11.35	6.55	7.20	9.00
Thessaloniki	8.45	10.40	10.20	4.25	10.55	6.45	4.45	7.45	16.50	22.05	6.25	11.50	9.25	17.10	6.40	5.45	12.25	13.10	8.20	9.50	13.15	8.35	9.00	10.40
Toulouse	7.45	10.15	9.30	4.00	10.00	7.15	3.55	8.15	17.20	22.40	6.30	11.45	9.55	16.20	6.25	4.55	12.55	13.40	7.25	8.50	13.45	9.05	8.05	11.10
Warszawa	8.15	10.10	9.50	3.55	10.25	6.15	4.15	7.15	16.20	21.35	5.55	11.20	8.55	16.40	6.10	5.15	11.55	12.40	7.50	9.20	12.45	8.05	8.30	10.10
Wien	7.35	9.30	9.10	3.15	9.45	5.35	3.35	6.35	15.40	20.55	5.15	10.40	8.15	16.00	5.30	4.35	11.15	12.00	7.10	8.40	12.05	7.25	7.50	9.30
Zagreb	7.35	9.35	9.15	3.20	9.50	5.40	3.40	6.40	15.45	21.00	5.20	10.45	8.20	16.05	5.35	4.40	11.20	12.05	7.15	8.45	12.10	7.30	7.55	9.35
Zürich	6.25	8.20	8.00	2.05	8.35	4.25	2.25	5.25	14.30	19.45	4.05	9.30	7.05	14.50	4.20	3.25	10.05	10.50	6.00	7.30	10.55	6.15	6.40	8.20

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13.50	19.10	20.20	8.15	15.35	11.00	9.35	12.00	9.10	8.35	9.40	21.00	11.10	9.30	10.40	9.55	5.20	13.45	20.05	15.40	17.50	7.50	6.40	24.50	11.35	5.15	5.00
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12.30	17.50	19.00	6.55	14.15	9.40	8.15	10.40	7.50	7.15	8.20	19.40	9.50	8.10	9.20	8.35	4.00	12.25	18.45	14.20	16.30	6.30	5.20	23.30	10.15	3.55	3.40
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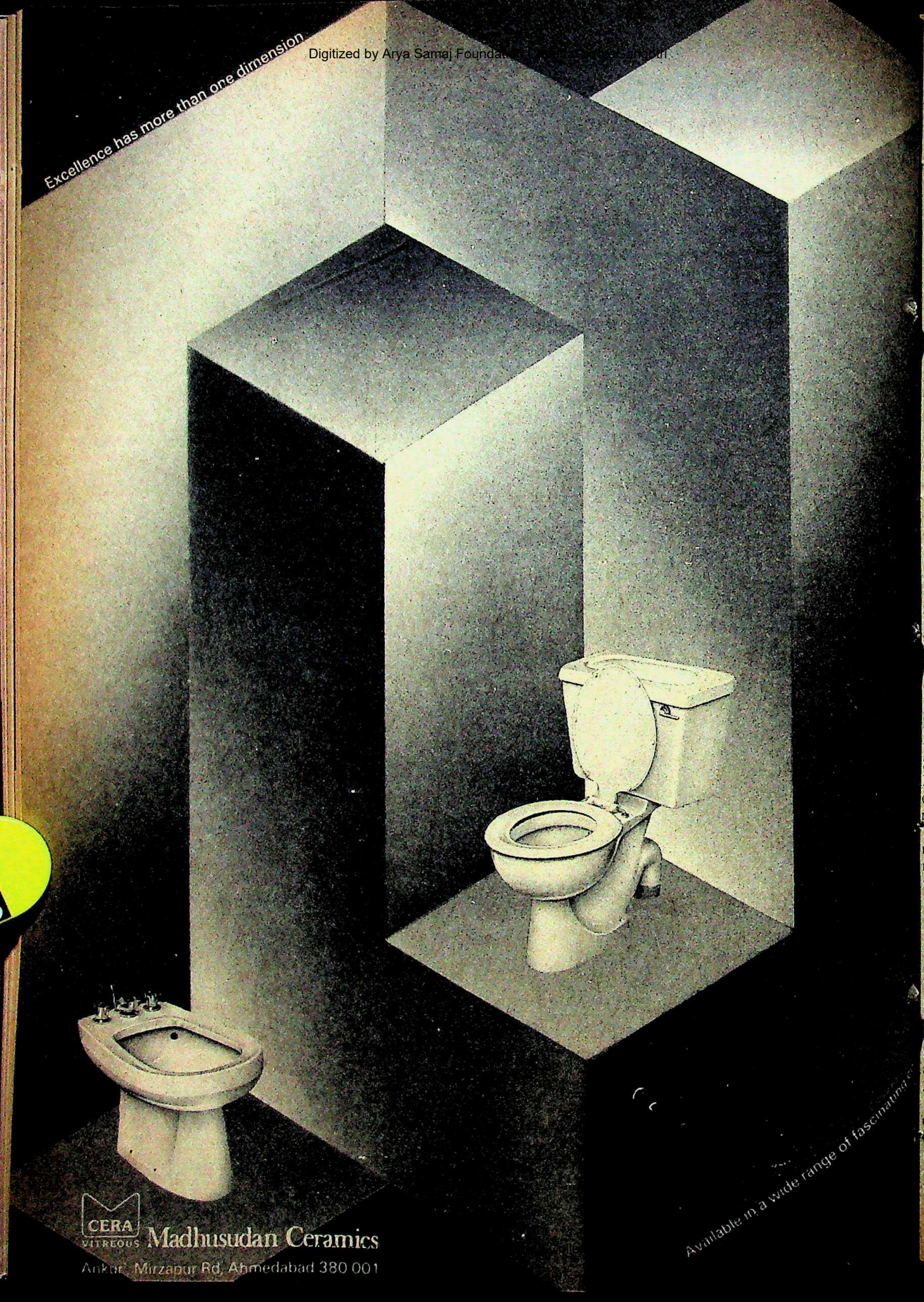
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KARNATAKA

Weathering the Storm

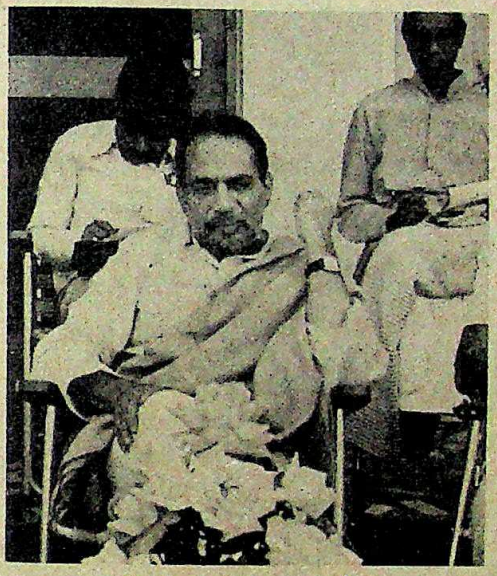
LAST fortnight, Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde returned to work after treatment in a Bangalore nature cure clinic for sudden pains in his joints. He looked weak but somewhat rejuvenated, a condition that could as easily have described the health of his government that celebrated its first year in office on January 10. Having just successfully thwarted yet another destabilising foray by the Congress(I) in their dogged bid to regain power in the strategic southern state, the Janata Party-led state Government was last week breathing considerably easier but it's defences still remained perilously weakened. Hegde, however, exuded confidence. "My Government is very healthy and free from any ailment. It is only the climate that is unhealthy," he quipped. Obviously, his reference had nothing to do with Bangalore's weather but the hostile and uncloaked attempts by the Centre to batter away at the Janata battlements until something finally gives.

Till now, it has largely been a battle between brain and brawn as a recent episode so dramatically demonstrated. Shrewdly anticipating that the Congress(I) would approach the state Governor, A.N. Banerjee, with a list of alleged defectors, the Janata Government staged a show of support to Hegde that successfully checkmated the Congress(I). In an unusual move, three state Cabinet ministers, S.R. Bommai, H.D. Deve Gowda and Abdul Nazir Sab handed Banerjee a memorandum containing signatures of 103 Janata Party members as the year was coming to an end.

Secure Position: The list included the names of 13 independents who are associate members of the party. Initially, Banerjee raised minor technical objections, insisting that the memorandum be submitted by the party head. Since Hegde was away in Doddballapur, party chief D. Manjunath happily obliged. The memorandum effectively countered Congress(I) claims that Hegde had lost his majority. Leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Communist Party of India (CPI) and Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M), reiterated their support to the Hegde Ministry, giving his Government a comfortable majority of 130 in the 225-member lower house.

The memorandum took the wind right out of the Congress(I) sails. Party chief K.H. Patil and his followers were hoping to submit to the governor a list containing the signatures of claimed defectors from the Janata Party and demand that Banerjee dismiss the ministry. In a bid to salvage lost prestige, Congress(I) leaders Veerappa Moily and Patil met the governor and requested him not to dissolve the Assembly if the Janata Government requested it. Moily then went on to dismiss the memorandum as a "political stunt".

Making News: The governor was not the only one to find his name in the news. K.H. Patil who had so far managed to keep his name out of any controversies despite handling 'operation topple', had to face something of an embarrassment, himself. He was caught in an awkward situation when he was found in the room of a five-star hotel with Shalinitai Patil, MP, wife of Maharashtra Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil, by income tax officials. Patil was supposed to have attended his party's plenary session in Calcutta, but had stayed away, and here he was in Bangalore, according to two daily newspapers, arguing vociferously with income tax officials.



Hegde: seasoned survivor

Patil dubbed the reports as a "concocted cock-and-bull story," but the next day Shalinitai confirmed the raid, calling it an "accident". She confirmed that Patil was present at that time. Ultimately, both Patil and Shalinitai were forced to issue a joint statement asserting that what one had denied and the other had confirmed were two different things. Although no political mileage was gained by the Janata Party over the incident, it certainly made the Congress(I) a laughing stock in the state. Said Law Minister Lakshmisagar derisively: "They should have cross-checked with each other before issuing contradictory statements."

Shalinitai stoutly maintained that she had come to Bangalore to have her asthma problem treated. But her fellow partymen confirmed reports that she was there to woo the five Maharashtra Ekkikaran Samiti (MES) MLA's from Belgaum district. The effort proved to be a partial success. The MES said they would remain neutral but Moily saw it as "the beginning of the fall of the Government like a pack of cards".

Interesting Meeting: Political observers, however, paid greater attention to a meeting between S. Bangarappa, the Karnataka Kranti Ranga leader, and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. While neither of them were willing to reveal what transpired, it was clear that Bangarappa, was planning a "homecoming". Bangarappa, who has five MLA's to back him, would clearly give the Congress(I) a boost. But the Kranti Ranga chief is unlikely to merge with the Congress(I) unless it agrees to his demand of the post of chief ministership if it forms a government.

The next round in the toppling game is likely to be fought on the floor of the Legislative Assembly when the lower house meets from January 16. It certainly promises to be an eventful session with the Congress(I) planning a no-confidence move against the Janata Government. While Hegde is "confident" of surviving the session, many of his partymen are viewing it with apprehension. A Janata leader said worriedly: "They have succeeded in stopping the exodus of MLA's from their own party as well as creating an atmosphere of uncertainty in the state. We are keeping our fingers crossed."

Troubled Future: And well they might, for late last fortnight there were indications that trouble might be brewing even within the ministry. Addressing a hastily-convened press conference, Labour Minister Azeez Sait complained angrily of being "shadowed" and "suspected" by forces working against him within the Government. The Government suffered another blow when Janata MLA Ugra Narasimhappa announced that he was defecting to the Congress(I).

But if Hegde is able to weather the Assembly session, he can look forward to getting down to business after months of political uncertainty. While in the first year, Hegde's primary aim was to ensure that the only Janata government in the country survives he is likely to be bolder now. Already he is planning to expand his Cabinet after the session and make the much-delayed appointments of chairmen to various boards and corporations. He is also likely to get down to implementing the massive employment and agricultural schemes he has announced. Says he, determinedly: "There's no question of us just hanging on. Now either we do something or get out."

—RAJ CHENGAPPA and K. BHANUMATHI

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THE JAIPUR UDYOG LIMITED

Chairman's Statement to the Shareholders at the 35th Annual General Meeting held on 28th December, 1983



Shri D.N. Parsad

Jaipur Udyog has been ailing for over a decade. Plagued by a multitude of complex problems it has presented a real challenge to the management. The cement plant set up some 30 years ago, today presents obsolescent technology and worn-out equipment and machinery. It confronts inadequate energy inputs and high cost of transportation of limestone from mines located 25 kms from the plant. Remedial action has been extremely difficult because of constrained resources — a direct outcome of the critical financial situation caused by inadequate realisation from low retention prices. Consequently there has been a continuous erosion of net worth and accumulation of losses adding to the staggering debts to the Central Government, State Bank of India, Government of Rajasthan and other institutions.

It has been our endeavour in the last one and a half years to achieve a major breakthrough in production, sales and profits, by making full use of the golden opportunity provided by the realistic pricing policy enforced since 28th February, 1982.

We have made significant advances towards the revival of your Company. The salient performance figures of 1982-83 speak for themselves. Production in the year under review has been the highest in the last four years. Cement production is up by 19%, clinker by 15%, sales turnover by 58% and contribution to exchequer by 77%. The Balance Sheet is out of the red for the first time in eleven years. The year has ended with a gross profit of Rs.754.55 lakhs and net profit of Rs.464.67 lakhs, the highest ever achieved. The surpluses generated have been appropriately used for major repairs and capital rehabilitation, labour welfare measures and substantial repayments to the Central Government, State Bank of India, Government of Rajasthan and other institutions.

We have adopted a corporate strategy for improving capacity utilisation, productivity and profitability. The highlights include :

(i) increase in captive power by installation of two diesel generating sets with a capacity of 6.30 MW;

(ii) capital rehabilitation program involving an investment of Rs.5 to 6 crores for the next 3 to 5 years;

(iii) introduction of Productivity Enhancement Program with the association of scientists and technologists of Cement Research Institute of India, to both increase productivity and reduce energy consumption.

The financial institutions have agreed to consider our request for financing procurement and installation of Diesel Generating Sets and are considering assisting the capital rehabilitation program. This is a measure of the confidence they are now reposing in the current financial viability of your Company.

It is an axiom of industrial development that industrial units either grow or decay. While decay can be assured only by a long range perspective and advance action. Keeping this objective in view we are investigating the possibilities of modernizing the plant and creating additional production capacity with latest technology and equipment. This will ensure adequate utilization of the mining resources available in the Pali Chambal area.

I have no doubt that in the coming years with a firm commitment from the management, dedicated hard work of the employees and the whole hearted co-operation and active support of all associated agencies your Company will continue to contribute its mite to the growth of the cement industry, so crucial to the development of our economy.

Dr. D.N. Prasad
Chairman &
Managing Director

Note : This does not purport to be a record of the proceedings of the annual general meeting.

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MAHARASHTRA

The Wedding March

THE WEDDING reception was originally scheduled for a five-star hotel. But as the guest list ballooned, venues were hastily switched to Bombay's Princess Victoria and Mary Gymkhana, and again a week before the event, to the football field at the Cooperage. Considering the number of guests that eventually showed up—estimates varied from 15,000 to 60,000—nothing less than a playing field would have accommodated the wedding of Neelam, daughter of former Maharashtra chief minister, A.R. Antulay, last fortnight. The event easily put in the shade other recent glamorous nuptial rites such as those of Swraj Paul's son in Delhi and Dhirubhai Ambani's daughter in Goa.

"It was no wedding reception but a mini icc session," quipped one of the guests. The queue to greet the beaming father of the bride was so long that it outdid any ration queue in the city. Guests lined up patiently for half an hour and more, many clutching bouquets and others with envelopes despite the invitation card which stated "no presents please". Favoured VIP's, as usual formed a special queue for the darshan, but former chief minister, Babasaheb Bhosale, who unwittingly joined the main line and then asked to jump the queue was put in his place when some guests shouted, "Bhosale, get back in line".

Commanding Influence: The vast gathering was telling evidence that Antulay, though out of power and threatened by a case of corruption, continues to command tremendous influence both within his party and outside. Many of the political guests who showed up had a year ago struck Antulay off their visiting list. President Zail Singh flew down from Delhi for the wedding along with several members of his family. So did Central ministers P.V. Narasimha Rao, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Kalpnath Rai, Arif Mohammed Khan and Jaffer Sharif. Lok Sabha Speaker, Balram Jakhar, who was in Bombay for the speakers' conference not only came but brought along the speakers from all the other state assemblies as well.

The elegant guests in silks and suits jostled with raffish invitees from Bhendi Bazar and simple Maharashtrian peasants from all over the state. The Antulays not only despatched thousands of gilt-edged invitations in English and Marathi but also sent a cyclostyled personal letter from Antulay to known sarpanches and other village heads. In districts as far away as Chandrapur, Akola and Yeotmal whole groups of villagers decided to lend their presence and special bogies had to be attached at the Nagpur railway station. Predictably the Konkan was well represented. Explaining away the number of gatecrashers, Antulay magnanimously remarked: "The affection of friends and well-wishers brushed aside the protocol of a formal invitation."

In the melee many never got within hailing distance of the bride's father and hundreds wrote in later to register their attendance. Industrialist S.P. Jain in a letter of regret remarked: "In spite of my best effort I could not meet you as there was such a rush. It was a virtual stampede." The Consul General of Kuwait phoned in to explain that he had tried to get in at 7.45 p.m. but couldn't. He made a second trip at 9 p.m. and still found it impossible to squeeze in.

Noted names from fields such as sports, film, medicine, law and music went practically unnoticed in the jamboree. Actor Sunil Dutt as one of the masters of ceremonies was busy ordering people off an overcrowded platform ready to cave in, but he was ignored. Former sheriff and heart specialist B.K. Goyal was another organiser. Sunil Gavaskar, Ajit Wadekar, Dev Anand, Kalyanji, Anandji, Sanjay Khan, Nutan, Nimmi, Nirupa Roy and Rajendra Kumar were lost in the crowd.

Surprising Appearances: Two names closely linked with the Antulay trust scandals, Ajit Kerkar, director of the Taj Group of Hotels and millionair Nirmal Sethia, who flew down from London with his wife mingled with the crowds as did one-time COFEPOSA detenue Yusuf Patel decked out in a diamond-studded kurta. Underworld boss Karim Lala came accompanied by a large group of toughs. Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil and his wife Shalinitai turned up as did almost the entire Maharashtra Cabinet.







A beaming Antulay with (from left) the wedding couple, the Patils and wife Nargis; President Zail Singh; Speaker Jakhar, Bal Thackeray and Sunil Dutt: show of support

Known Antulay detractor Sharad Pawar, leader of the Congress(S), rubbed shoulders with Justice S.C. Pratap of the Bombay High Court who had admitted the writ against Antulay. Governor I.H. Latif who had given his assent to Antulay's prosecution was there as well.

Somewhat forgotten in the midst of this hurly-burly was the bride, a pretty economics graduate decked out in a red and gold lehanga and choli, marrying her first cousin Mushtaq who has just started a transport company. Her father, on the other hand, sweat pouring down his face, was mobbed.

Only the most determined hunger marchers succeeded in battling their way to get at the kulfis, the only refreshment offered. But no one complained about lack of sustenance. As a special exception, coconut water was brought for the President. As the gratified host Antulay observed: "With God's grace it has all gone well." Whether he meant the wedding or the show of support remained unclear.

—COOMI KAPOOR

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WEST BENGAL

Going At The Governor

RELATIONS between the Centre and non-Congress(I) state governments have traditionally been antagonistic. In West Bengal, however, the simmering feud erupted into open war last fortnight with the Left Front Government deciding to boycott all functions attended by Congress(I) functionaries and also Governor A.P. Sharma. This rather dramatic move was seemingly provoked by Sharma himself, who as chancellor of Calcutta University appointed Santosh Bhattacharya as vice-chancellor, disregarding the recommendation of the state Government that Ramen Poddar, the last incumbent, be retained in office.

On the face of it, Sharma was acting within his constitutional privilege. But he was certainly breaking convention, and his action sparked off a fresh controversy in the highly political academic circles of the university. Poddar was, significantly, the Marxist favourite in the vice-chancellorship stakes. The governor's move in endorsing the Congress(I)-Janata Party-backed candidate instead, hardly did anything for his popularity either with the state Government or the Marxist-dominated university.

An angry Left Front Chairman Saroj Mukherjee called upon legislators and ministers not to attend any function at which Sharma was present, unless they had the permission of Chief Minister Jyoti Basu. Said Mukherjee: "By disregarding the advice of the ministry the governor has acted in a manner wholly partisan and undemocratic, and we cannot but protest against this." Basu proved a loyal soldier by toeing the line: on January 8, he was not present at a legal aid conference in Calcutta inaugurated by the governor. S.A.M. Habibullah, who did attend, said he had Basu's permission to do so. And even though the chief minister had perforce to attend the swearing-in of the new minister Nihar Bose by the governor on January 10, none of the other legislators were present, except for two ministers from the Forward Bloc, of which Bose is a member.

Strong Case: But Sharma himself continues to justify his dismissal of the state Government's advice. Says he: "When making the appointment, I went by the number of votes polled and selected the one who had secured the highest number. What is wrong with that?" Sharma may be technically right, but the Marxists do not agree. They argue that mere numbers do not matter. And they do have some precedents to go by: in 1954, Jnan Chandra Ghosh was appointed vice-chancellor even though he got two votes less than his competitor, the eminent scientist Satyendranath Bose. Similarly, in 1955, after Ghosh's death, Nirmal Kumar Siddhanta was appointed in his place despite having secured fewer votes than Sisirkumar Mitra.

Unfortunately for Poddar, a miscalculation on the part of the Marxists (INDIA TODAY, January 15) led to Bhattacharya securing 5 first preference votes over his own total of 35. Still, the Marxists banked on the tradition that a governor endorses and appoints the Government's choice.

Obviously, the fact that Sharma's decision was within the law did not convince too many people. The leftist Students Federation of India (SFI) and a section of university employees prevented Bhattacharya from entering the campus on the first day of his term. This was immediately followed by a students' strike in educational institutio Although an overtly optimistic Bhattach ya maintains that he will be able to get cooperation of everybody in the univers the facts would seem to indicate otherw

Leftist Bias: For instance, in the member Senate, the Left Front has a st gth of 97 of whom 71 belong to the CPI(M the 35-member Syndicate, which is the p cy-implementing body, the Left Front ha supporters, including 19 from the CP Even in the Undergraduate Council, wh oversees the working of the state's colle 10 belong to the Left Front; eight of the the CPI(M). And to complete the picture Karmachari Samsad, the university ployees' union, is also dominated by left

Chances are the sheer strength in n bers of the CPI(M) and its Left Front allis the university will saddle Bhattacharya w myriad problems. Warns Anil Biswas, S ate member and CPI(M) leader: "There can no question of unconditional cooperati We will have to consider each and every p posal of the vice-chancellor on its merit, a decide." He added that as the chancellor the university, the governor should h considered the "reality of the situati before taking his decision. Sharma has ignored a memorandum signed by 76 Se members demanding that Poddar be allo to remain in office. Commented an SFI der: "If he (Sharma) is such a great bel in numerical strength, he should have ourably considered this majority deman

In the face of such opposition, Bha charya can look to limited support, as th now stand. Those who will back him inc Chandan Roy Chowdhury of the C gress(I) and Dilip Chakravarty of the Jan both Senate members. Although the two politically poles apart, they are united b common antipathy to the Marxists. An the near future, their ability to get alon likely to be tested.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Governor Sharma (left) and controversial appointee Bhattacharya: angry reaction

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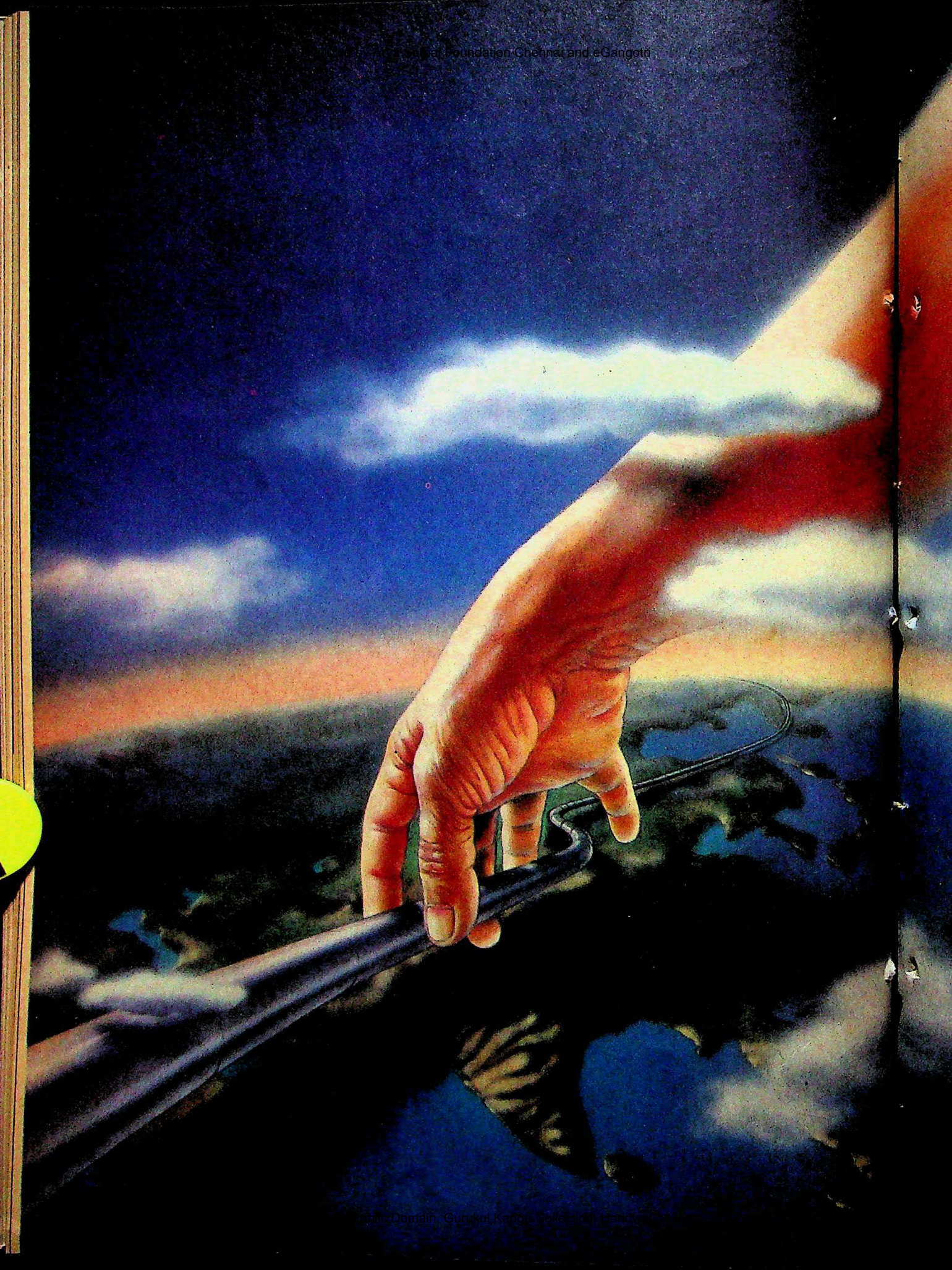
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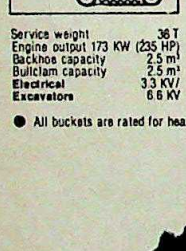
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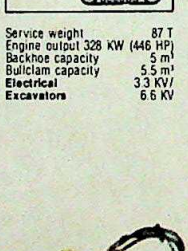
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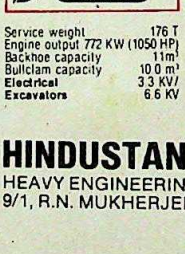
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Service weight	87 T
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Service weight	115 T
Engine output 535 KW	(725 HP)
Backhoe capacity	7.5 m³
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Service weight	176 T
Engine output 772 KW	(1050 HP)
Backhoe capacity	11m³
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Electrical Excavators	3.3 KV/ 6.6 KV



Service weight	280 T
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Surrounded by a formidable group of resentful and potentially uncooperative colleagues, Bhattacharya will undoubtedly find his new job well cut out for him. For his part, however, his champion, Sharma, is quite indifferent to the Left Front's boycott call. Asked whether such a situation would not lead to an administrative deadlock, the governor replied stoically: "Why should there be a deadlock? If the ministers do not wish to see me, it is their own affair."

The fact remains, though, that by his deviation from the accepted norms of constitutional headship, Sharma has given the ruling Marxists enough reason for a fight. And they are certainly not about to let go the opportunity to rouse public opinion against the "undemocratic action of a representative of the Congress(I)-ruled Centre".

With general elections expected to be held in a year's time, Marxist leaders like Saroj Mukherjee and Jyoti Basu are quite willing to see Sharma's action as part of a larger, sinister plan. They believe this might mark the beginning of the Congress(I)'s pre-election attacks on the Left Front, and are gearing up to fight back. Affirmed Mukherjee: "We are considering other methods of protest also against the governor's action." Thus, although the elections haven't even been announced yet, in West Bengal at least, the battle for votes has already begun.

—SUMANTA SEN

BIHAR

Babu Backlash



BUREAUCRATS are supposed to be shadowy, faceless figures working quietly in government departments; not making headlines in the dailies. But 133 civil servants broke the stereotype in Bihar on January 5, when they dramatically took mass casual leave to protest against the behaviour of certain "erring politicians". This unexpected move came in the wake of Mrs Gandhi's visit to Patna the previous day, where at a public address, she gave Chief Minister Chandra Shekhar Singh's five-month-old Government what his men construed as a "good performance certificate". But ironically, the event was all but eclipsed by a blatant public display of indiscipline that hardly reinforced the party image.

Administration officials evidently stuck rather strictly to security guidelines. Legislators and MP's making for reserved enclosures at the maidan where the public address was held, found their way blocked. They jostled and shoved through, clashing with the officials in the process. In the resulting mêlée, one MP was struck by the police, while another shouted and threatened the district magistrate who tried to prevent him getting to the rostrum.

Fighting Back: Instead of taking it all passively, the Bihar Civil and Administrative Services Association (BCASA) shot off letters to the speakers of the state Assembly and the Lok Sabha demanding a public apology. Added BCASA spokesman Gyanoo Singh: "Otherwise we will not cooperate with them in the future." More significantly, one magistrate, T.N.Jha, actually filed a first information report (FIR) in which he named, among others, MP and Youth Congress(I) leader Tariq Anwar.

Observers see the entire affair as symptomatic of the deep divisions within the faction-ridden ruling party in the state. Recent events have certainly done nothing to improve matters, and the party's debacle in the recent by-election in Bettiah might actually have deepened the internal disaffection. Party candidate Dr Manoj Pandey, son of the late Kedar Pandey who had held the seat, lost to the CPI by a humiliating 11,000-odd votes. The acrimony displayed before Mrs Gandhi was only a reflection of the mutual recrimination and blame that followed the party's defeat in a constituency where it had won by a margin of over 100,000 votes in the 1980 elections.

Internal Strife: The past four months have certainly been tense. With Chandra Shekhar Singh and Jagannath Mishra embroiled in an internecine power struggle, followers of the former chief minister have charged Singh with witch-hunting. They attribute the Bettiah debacle to the demoralisation of the party rank following the suspension of four local party leaders, ostensibly supporters of Mishra. They also point out that Mishra was first asked to keep away from the constituency, then invited in the last minute to campaign for the party, and conveniently saddled with the blame—all of which, they claim, is a conspiracy of the PCC(I). Mishra agrees: "There is certainly a conspiracy to implicate me and my supporters in false charges by shifting all failures to us."

Soon after the results were out, 62 pro-chief minister legislators, most of them aspirants for ministership, demanded stern action against the Mishra group for "sabotaging" the poll. But Singh himself, on his return from Calcutta, confessed that the defeat was caused by many factors. Displaying for the first time the differences between him and state party chief Ram Sharan Singh, he claimed he had known nothing of the suspensions. "I was never consulted by him about the suspensions, and came to know of it only from the newspapers," he said. Those demanding his resignation over this issue, he added severely, seemed to be more interested in his ouster than in the well-being of the party.



KRISHNA MURARI KISHAN

Mishra welcomes Mrs Gandhi to Patna as Singh (right) looks on: evident rift

Threats: Meanwhile, Mishra supporters are once more warming up for a fight. During the plenary session of the party at Calcutta, 92 pro-Mishra legislators and party workers submitted a memorandum to the high command, and even met Mrs Gandhi and Rajiv. Said a party elder, Kamalnath Singh Thakur: "We told Rajiv that whatever we are doing, we are doing it in the interest of the party. Those who have been assigned to run its affairs are in fact destroying it—the result at Bettiah is an indication of this." Added another supporter: "We are ready for a show-down with the ministerialists who are trying to isolate us."

This will possibly be the nth indecisive show-down, if it does materialise. The only fact that seems likely to be proved beyond doubt is that Bihar continues to be one of the most persistent thorns in Mrs Gandhi's side.

—FARZAND AHMED

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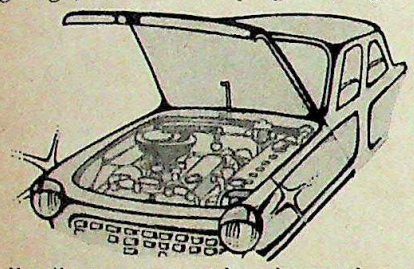
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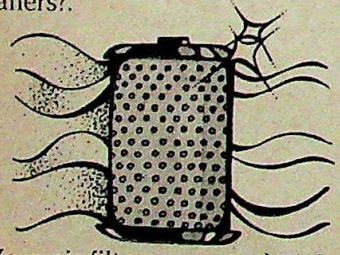


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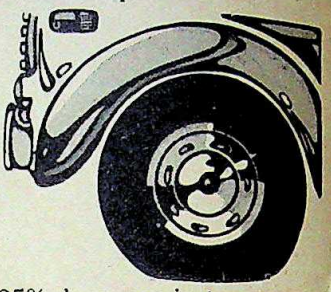
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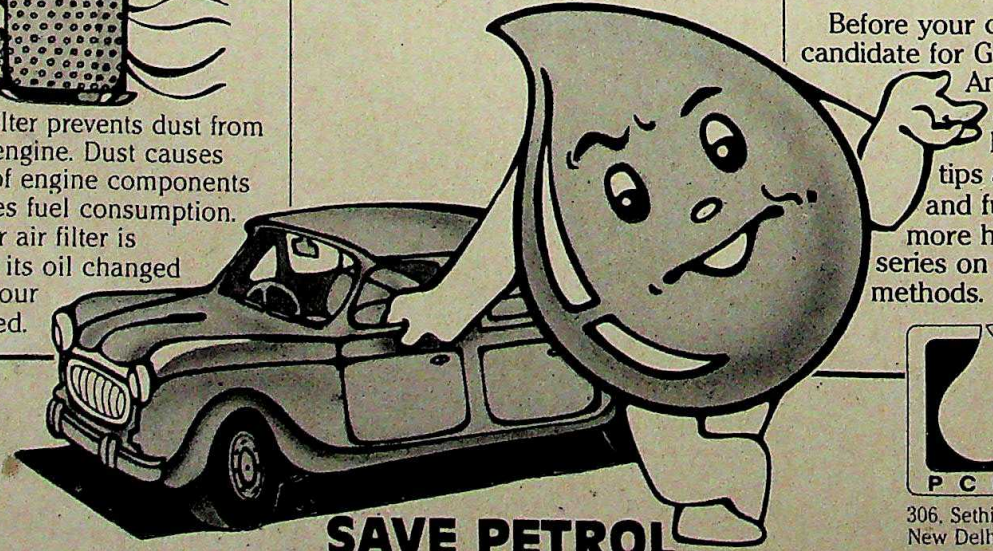
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MANIPUR

Reprieve for the Rebels

THE FIGHT against urban guerillas in the Imphal valley has come full circle. Last month, as the counter-insurgency units of the army completed three years of their hasty induction into Manipur they could not have looked back with much satisfaction, but not for want of trying. In the first two years of the campaign the army and other paramilitary forces had been able to account for most of the prominent functionaries of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the Communist Party of Kangleipak (KCP) and the various factions of the People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) as dead or in prison. But last month as the Gauhati High Court firmly ordered the release on bail of Nameirakpam Bisheshwar Singh, leftist ideologue and the illustrious founder-chief of the PLA, the army painfully swallowed a stark civilian reality; you cannot keep a man in jail indefinitely unless proved guilty in a court and armies do not investigate crimes or try civilians.

The terse orders from Justice N. Ibotombi Singh had only brought about yet another logical step in the process of release of untried insurgents that began a few months ago. Today, in and around Imphal, over 200 former insurgents—over 70 per cent of them 'black' (confirmed guerillas in army parlance)—roam around as free men, waiting for the release of Bisheshwar and their other *ojhas* (chiefs) like Chirom Ranjit Singh and Rajan Achouba Singh.

Low Bail: In fact, it is incredible that the Manipur police have somehow managed to hold on to Bisheshwar who, arrested in the course of the famous Tekcham encounter in 1981, was considered the most important catch of all times. Few people in Manipur believe that no one in the state is prepared to stand bail—just Rs 5,000 and two sureties of the same amount for Bisheshwar. Said a police officer in Imphal: "Who would like to stand bail for Bisheshwar when it is so well known that he will just melt into the bush once out of jail." Mused a pro-PLA intellectual in Manipur University: "It is possible that he himself does not want to come out of the prison now for fear of assassination."

For a man hunted two years ago by soldiers this was quite a remarkable turn in fortunes. Nearly six years after Bisheshwar launched his PLA on the ideological plans laid out in his very own poor man's Red Book *Dawn* (Volumes I and II) and many a bloody battle with state forces the Government now had next to nothing against him in court. Said M. Karunamayee, the superintendent of police, Imphal: " The committal proceedings against him have already begun in cases under the Arms Act, for assault on public servants on duty and for attempting to kill 2nd Lieutenant Cyrus Pithawla (wounded in the Tekcham encounter)."

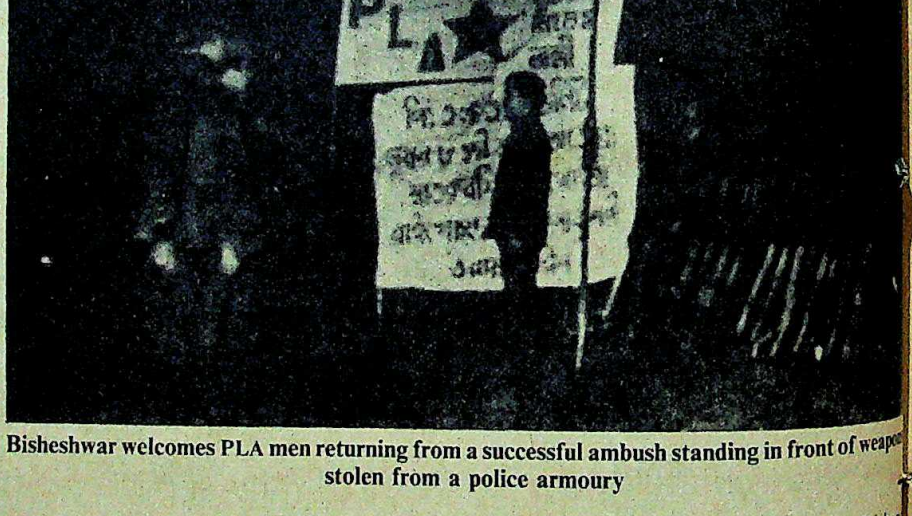
However senior policemen say there is very little evidence to back most of the cases, other than the ones under the Arms Act. Admitted a top-level policeman: "There is no way we can try rebels for sedition. Under Indian law this is the most difficult crime to prove. In fact I cannot recall conviction of anyone other than Nagi Reddy of Andhra Pradesh for seditious conspiracy."

Legal Complications: Nothing characterises the helplessness and inefficiency of the Government than its failure to properly prosecute Bisheshwar, who was transferred to detention under the NSA on August 19, 1981, shortly after his arrest by the army. On completion of his one-year NSA term he was held for nearly six months as an undertrial in the Imphal jail, notorious for its porosity. Almost unknown to the world he was granted bail first by the chief judicial magistrate (central), Imphal in February 1983. Later, his lawyers and the functionaries of the Civil Liberties and Human Rights Organisation of Manipur approached the high court at Gauhati to secure his release and better treatment for him in the jail.

In a hard-hitting judgement Ibotombi Singh not only confirmed the chief judicial magistrate's bail orders but stated, "if the accused be released on bail on execution of bonds mentioned above he shall not be arrested in another FIR case in respect of the incident prior to his release without the permission of the CJM," making it impossible for the police to employ their favourite trick of rearresting the undertrial in some old case immediately after his release. Even more significantly, Ibotombi Singh observed: "The chief judicial magistrate should scrupulously observe the mandatory provision of law where liberty of citizen is involved." Says Joychandra Singh, editor and proprietor of *Daily Prajatantra* and president of the Civil Liberties and Human Rights Organisation of Manipur: "This clearly implies that those undertrials against whom the prosecution is not able to file charge-sheets in a certain period of time should be automatically bailed out under Sub-clause(2) of Section 167 of the CrPC."

Most government functionaries seem to accept this and are resigned to the prospect of seeing practically all the alleged rebels freed. Says Chief Minister Rishang Keishing:" It is indeed very nice that of the 200 men released so far hardly any have gone underground. One, Rajan Singh did do so but was caught by Assam police after an encounter near Gauhati." But other points to the release of other top-level rebel functionaries. These include:

- Ayekpam Surenmacha, commander-in-chief of PREPAK.
- Thockcham Robin, Shekhar Singh, Ibungo Singh, Naoba Singh and Ingobi Singh of the PLA.
- Ruichumhao Raising, the regional chairman of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) for the entire Tangkhul region of east Manipur, who has been arrested yet again.
- Self-styled Lieutenant Janeth Tangkhul of the NSCN, allegedly involved in two murders and in the ambush of the Sikh Regiment



Bisheshwar welcomes PLA men returning from a successful ambush standing in front of weapons stolen from a police armoury

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convoy at Namthilok in February 1982.

Chief Minister Rishang indirectly admits that the Government has failed to find a way out of the predicament. Says he: "What can we do? The judges are reluctant to try the insurgents. We had decided to set up special courts but throughout the country, judges are just not available for the job. But this is one scheme we are still trying to work out." But sources in the secretariat point to the fact that three of the four judges who had agreed to come returned midway and the fourth, from Assam, insisted that his court should be in Gauhati and that he should not have to come to Imphal at all.

RISHANG and his political lieutenants are beginning to think in terms of some kind of a rapprochement with the rebels. Said a cabinet member: "Let us now accept that it will be impossible to secure convictions in most of the cases. Longwinded trials will not only sanctify insurgency but would also make heroes of rebels and devils of us as more and more people are released. The best way out is a compromise."

Consequently, the political functionaries of the Government have been sending feelers to the rebels to seek pardon by writing apologies and accepting a solution within the framework of the Constitution. Said a bureaucrat: "In both Mizoram and Nagaland insurgency was not controlled by jailing key rebel leaders. These are highly motivated, committed people. If they could be persuaded into bidding farewell to arms in tribal states and accepted back by the Government what is so terribly wrong with doing the same with the Manipuris?"

The movement for reconciliation also gathered support from the letter that Bisheshwar recently wrote to Rishang, seeking his release on account of indifferent health and expressing his intention to contest the 1985 assembly elections as an independent. Rishang followed it up with a tête-à-tête with Bisheshwar in jail but still awaits the prime minister's clearance. Says he: "We will not decide in a hurry. They must prove their bona fides."

Coming Closer: Rishang is obviously wary of surrender offers, going by Bisheshwar's past record. He took advantage of the amnesty in the mid-'70s to escape to Lhasa in China and launch the PLA. But, insists Joychandra Singh: "These are no real insurgents. They never said they wanted to go out of India. They only said they wanted to fight the Delhi goondas who spread corruption here and spoil Manipur through constant neglect. They should be pardoned and accepted back in society's fold."

In the Imphal valley now even most of the underground sympathisers and middle-ground activists feel that the way out ultimately will be an agreement of some kind with the rebels. Said a Meitei bureaucrat: "Why should the Government fight shy of winning over the Meitei rebels now? Scato Swu, who was the acting president of the Naga Federal Government in Phizo's absence is a nominated Congress(I) member of the Rajya Sabha now. Former commander-in-chief of the Naga rebel army, 'General' Zuheto Sema is a highly decorated BSF commandant. In Mizoram the Congress(I) has put its entire weight behind Laldenga. Why then be unkind to Bisheshwar and his men?" Observers in Manipur feel that the Government wants to time the success with the 1985 assembly elections.

Adamant Army: Yet, one group that will remain out of the purview of these efforts and hopes is the even more formidable NSCN, drawing its strength from the Tangkhul Naga country in east Manipur and threatening to keep insurgency alive in the region in the years to come. A Tangkhul himself,



A 'wanted' poster and (below) noted insurgents: renewed offensive


Y. Thanmi Tangkhul


Z. R. Tangkhul


S.Livingstone


Ng. Mark


S.Angelus Shimrah


T. P. Tangkhul

Rishang has tried to send conciliatory feelers to fellow tribesmen in the Burmese bush without much success and now, more than the PLA men, it is the release of NSCN fighters that is worrying the Government. Said an intelligence officer: "In the valley it is possible to keep a watch over bailed out rebels to some extent. But once they return to the Naga hills they just melt away and the weekly attendance at the police station ceases to have any meaning in areas close to the Burmese border."

But the relative absence of trouble in the valley has now given the army and the intelligence machinery more time and resources to concentrate on the NSCN and signs of the renewed offensive are visible even as passengers step into the lobby of the Tulihal airport on the outskirts of Imphal where posters with pictures of wanted NSCN men are plastered all over. Intelligence sources talk of reports of the failure of a Naga Federal Group (NFG) delegation, which reached Yunnan some time ago, to win fresh support from the Chinese. The Chinese are believed to have asked the two Naga rebel groups to unite and then come for aid. The consequence is the NSCN ultimatum to the NFG to merge with it or face annihilation.

In recent months the two groups have fought bloody skirmishes in northern and upper Burma. There are also rumblings of discontent in the NSCN leadership ensconced in its general headquarter at Kyetsan in upper Burma. Intelligence reports speak of strong differences between the Sema and Tangkhul groups, led by Isak Chish Swu and Thengalin Muivah respectively.

Wanted Figure: The man the army looks for most desperately now is Angelus Shimrah, the self-styled foreign secretary of the NSCN whom it missed by a hair's breadth in the course of a raid at Mapao village near Imphal four months ago. From his hut in Mapao the army found ample evidence of his links with Meitei and Assamese rebels. Intelligence sources say Angelus is still around Imphal valley with full authority from the NSCN headquarters to establish operational links with the other ethnic rebels. Obviously, there are not many takers for the Rs 25,000 prize promised in the posters for his arrest.

In the present changed situation, thus, the focus is on the NSCN. But as yet it will be fatuous in Manipur to talk in terms of a post-PLA or post-Bisheshwar era. For, the situation is now critically poised. With deft political handling the Government can isolate the NSCN and finish the PLA. Any mistakes now and the bulk of the 200-odd released rebels may be thrown back into insurgency. With his 86 surviving PLA men, Temba Singh in the jungle fastnesses of Burma is waiting for just that prospect.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Imphal

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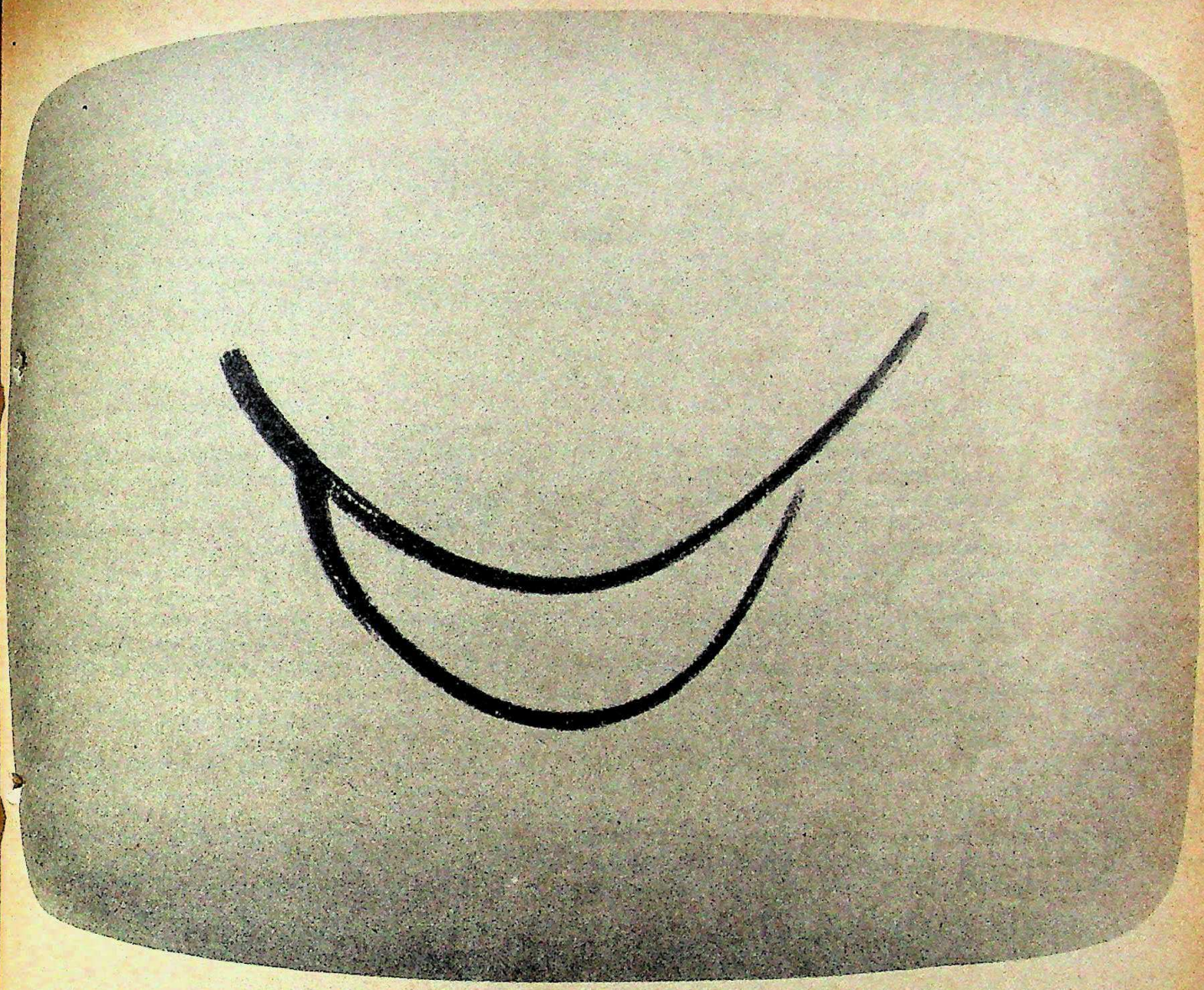
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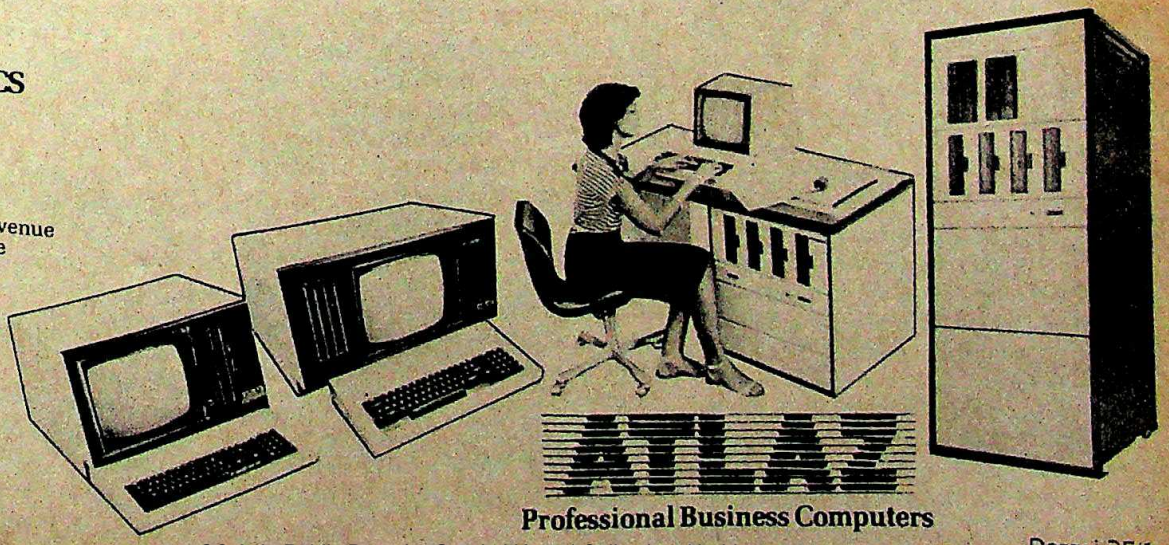
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ASSAM

The Waiting Game



IN THE Gauhati Circuit House by the side of the Brahmaputra, half-a-dozen sullen faces have become a common sight. Almost the whole day the bored old men are seen strolling in the lawns or just sitting out on benches reading books and newspapers. But waiters and orderlies still look at them with some curiosity for these old men are among the first few to have volunteered for the job of manning the newly set up tribunals to detect foreign nationals in Assam. Absolutely workless since they came in over a month ago, the retired district judges drawn from Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa have become the butt of many jokes and they themselves realise this. Said one: "What will people do except laugh at us? All my life I have never felt more useless."

Yet on the success of these hinges the survival of Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia and the ultimate success or failure of the Centre's strategy in Assam. And it is a measure of the utter chaos in Dispur and the bureaucratic hamhandedness that the entire tribunal venture has so far been a non-starter.

The initial delay, says Saikia with some justification, was caused by the non-availability of non-Assamese judges to man these. With great difficulty he managed to enrol 14, with offers of better pay, perks and exhortations of patriotism. Three of the judges—N.N. Chadha, J.N. Bansal and Manmohan Saran—have left without even formally taking charge. The way things are the rest may not stay very long too.

Complaints: Away from their families the retired judges are finding life difficult in the state's circuit houses. Explains a judge from Uttar Pradesh: "All the promises of additional salaries and perks have proved hollow. The Government promised us 25 per cent of the salary last drawn as special pay. Now they have put a rider that the special pay cannot be more than Rs 300. The car each one of us was promised has been reduced to a car for three judges strictly for official work. And, most humiliating of all, in place of the free furnished accommodation promised earlier the state Government now generously offers to keep us in the circuit houses." Explained another: "We haven't even been given money to transfer our families and household effects to Assam."

Sources in Dispur confirmed that the state Government had not yet been able to decide on the specifics of the judges' pays and perks and till it could get round the red tape in accountant-generals' offices in Shillong and the judges' respective parent states, the tribunal members would have to ma... do with a consolidated salary of Rs 1,500 ... month. Admitted a senior bureaucrat: "A... this rate it will be impossible for us to ke... these judges considering that most of the... were drawing much better salaries earlie... One of them even gave up his plush job as ... ceiver of sugar mills in Uttar Pradesh oste... sibly to serve the country." Promised Saik... "I know there are difficulties. But these ... merely administrative and it will take ... little time sorting them out."

But for his sake that may be a little ... late as more judges may leave shortly, add... further to the popular scepticism in the Br... maputra valley on the Government's inte... ions to begin detection of even post-1971 ... filtrators. Judge Hardev Singh in the Gauh... ti Circuit House points at his diminishi... waistline because of the near-starvation di... He cannot go on eating watery dal a... boiled rice forever, he says, and suggests th... if nothing else was possible they could ... given food from the kitchen of the ... jawans guarding the circuit house. Fell... judges L.R. Kohli, Ram Singh and Sukum... Das have similar problems. "Don't give ... promised salaries and palaces. But at le... don't make us starve away from our fam... lies," they complain.

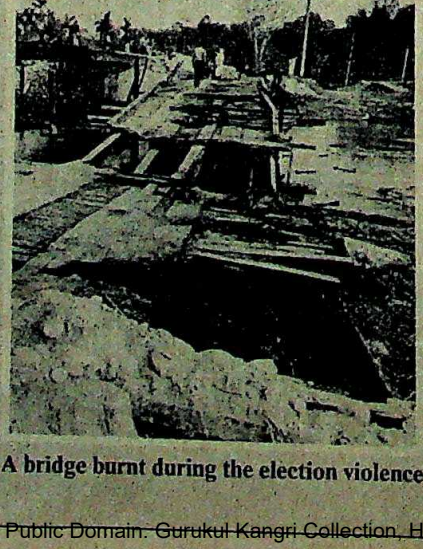
Missing Guidelines: However, adm... nistrative red tape is not the only factor t... has made the tribunals the laughing stock ... Assam. Till now, as Saikia himself adm... the state Government has not received fro... the Centre the guidelines to be followed ...

TEWARI COMMISSION

Evasive Answers

TRIBUNALS, the renewed "dissolve assembly" agitation and law and order were not the only problems exercising the minds of the men running the beleaguered Saikia Government in Assam last fortnight. As cabinet members and bureaucrats sat in longwinded huddles finalising the draft of the state Government's memorandum on the election violence for presentation before the one-man Tewari Commission of Inquiry, there were almost as many points of view as the number of bureaucrats and police officers who had conducted the poll. Even among the cabinet members there were sharp differences as to what approach the Government should follow in its analysis of the violence.

And even as people viewed with increasing cynicism the prospects of Tewari, a former Uttar Pradesh chief secretary, getting at the truth in view of the boycott of the inquiry by the agitators, there was no denying that even in its initial stages it had ruffled many feathers in Dispur. Through highly-placed sources INDIA TODAY has succeeded in obtaining the draft of the Government's 74-page memorandum to be placed before the commission and it makes interesting reading.



A bridge burnt during the election violence

After explaining the genesis of the present and continuing ethnic and communal tensions in Assam in the first 40 pages on the basis of population and land records the document blames the agitators for the violence as they "made all efforts to disturb elections by all means, all means including violence, arms, intimidation, assault etc". The Government claims: "Against these desperate elements were the majority of the people of the state who had faith in democratic institutions and who chose to exercise their right to vote even in the face of grave hazards."

The memorandum contains some significant observations like: "The conflicts which took place cannot be called purely communal. Initially, the trouble had started as a conflict between pro-poll and anti-poll sections of the population in a wider sense between anti-agitationists and agitationists. In several parts of the state it took the form of a religious, ethnic or linguistic conflict with local issues relating to rights over land surfacing and giving intensity to the conflict."

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the police in detecting foreigners and the tribunals in conducting their work. Said Saikia: "I am myself very very keen that the tribunals show results. So much depends on that. I keep ringing up Mr P.P. Nayyar (special secretary in the Union Home Ministry) for guidelines and he says these will come soon." He adds, almost as if assuring himself: "We must do this."

The touch of desperation in his utterances only underlines the problems he faces in putting into effect an initiative with such wide-ranging political implications. Two of his cabinet colleagues, former chief minister Syeda Anwara Taimur now education minister, and Finance Minister Mohammed Idris have been holding out threats of direct actions if the tribunals touch people in their immigrant-dominated constituencies. Yet another former chief minister and the present PWD Minister Keshab Chandra Gogoi, leads the dissidents and is making capital of the delay in setting up tribunals. Strong administrative and political lobbies in the Centre too would like the tribunals experiment to end without as much as a whimper. Saikia, thus, finds himself more or less isolated on the tribunals project.

On the success of the tribunals hinges the survival of Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia and the ultimate success or failure of the Centre's strategy in Assam. It is a measure of the utter chaos in Dispur that the venture has so far been a non-starter.

No Volunteers: While the apathy to the tribunals among the state's political circles obviously stems from the fear of annoying the traditional immigrant vote banks, the lukewarm attitude of bureaucrats and police officers is provoked more by cynicism than lethargy. Saikia has not yet been able to find an efficient volunteer for the new post of IGP (border police) to be stationed at the border town of Dhubri and to lead the drive to detect foreigners. Similarly, both the police and the Home Department are hesitant to initiate even the groundwork for the detection process. Admitted a bureaucrat in Dispur: "No one wants to do the dirty work now though there are any number of people willing to look after the construction of border fencing which is supposed to be a more innocuous job. I think the Government has no choice but to seek repatriation of some of the Assam cadre officers posted out on deputation."

The Centre has, incidentally, created a new post of commissioner (border fencing) to be based in Gauhati. The first commissioner is expected to be Dr J.K. Barthakur, an Assamese and at present joint secretary in the Union Home Ministry. Saikia is also trying desperately to secure funds and resources from the Centre to finally start the old scheme for the creation of a riverine police force to patrol the vast stretches of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries that meander over the border tracts in the Goalpara and Dhubri districts and also to take the detection process right into the heart of the char areas—the numerous river islands along the river inhabited by immigrants.

BUT EVEN if the tribunals finally get going they will continue to suffer from a credibility problem based as they will be on the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act which got the President's assent last fortnight. Pro-agitation elements totally reject the new law and it has been received with cynicism even among administrative circles. For one, under the new law only those who came in after 1971 are considered foreigners, giving credence to widespread belief in Assam that the Centre wants to now thrust its own cut-off year on them, despite Home Minister P.C. Sethi's belated assurances to the contrary.

Besides, while the bill is an improvement on the existing laws in the sense that it gives all citizens the right to report to the tribunals about the presence of foreigners, it lays down that the complainant has to be from within a 3-km radius from the suspected foreigner's place of residence. Says AASU Assistant General Secretary Bharat Narah: "You know so well most of the foreigners

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... The Government goes on to an exercise in evasion: "It would be impossible to pinpoint the reasons for the disturbances as the situation was complex and the tasks which the administration faced were enormous. In a fastly developing situation the alertness, presence of mind and reactions of officers at the helm of affairs at the local level mattered most. The difficulties of terrain as also the transport system caused by the saboteurs proved a serious handicap for the rushing of the necessary forces to prevent untoward happenings and violence."

On the performance of the intelligence machinery the approach is only a little less evasive. Says the Government: "Due to the effect of the continued agitation for the last years as also disturbed conditions in the state, the functioning of the intelligence machinery required toning up. This was done within the constraints and limitations of the situation ...disruption in means of communication, roads, bridges etc, as also disruption in the postal and telecommunication system, to some extent, affected the collection of intelligence at grassroots level ...It has to be admitted that in a fastly (sic) developing situation of this nature, the intelligence from the state headquarters would provide only the broad indication of the trends and the district set-up had to rely on its own sources to enable quick, prompt and remedial measures as necessitated by the vastly changing situation and requirements of law and order."

Future Work: Finally, the document gives the Government's suggestions to prevent recurrence of similar tragedies and talks of the need for better intelligence gathering, a closer watch over the minority pockets, reduction in the size of districts, reorganisation of the police force and the creation of two battalions of a special anti-communal riot task force. Besides, says the memorandum: "The events have also brought into sharp focus the imperative need for strengthening and toning up of the intelligence system in the state. A scheme is under examination under which it is proposed to build up a more extensive base right up to thana level for collection of intelligence with clearly demarcated channels of command and communication so as to ensure quick transmission and intelligent appraisal of the information from various sources."

On a rare note of realism, however, the Government accepts that the "problem of rights over the land having been used for stirring up rivalries and bitterness in several places" it had decided to "revamp land revenue system" and hasten the process of survey and settlement operations. Promises the Government: "All the non-cadestral areas will be brought under survey and land revenue measures intensified so that uncertainty in regard to land rights doesn't continue."

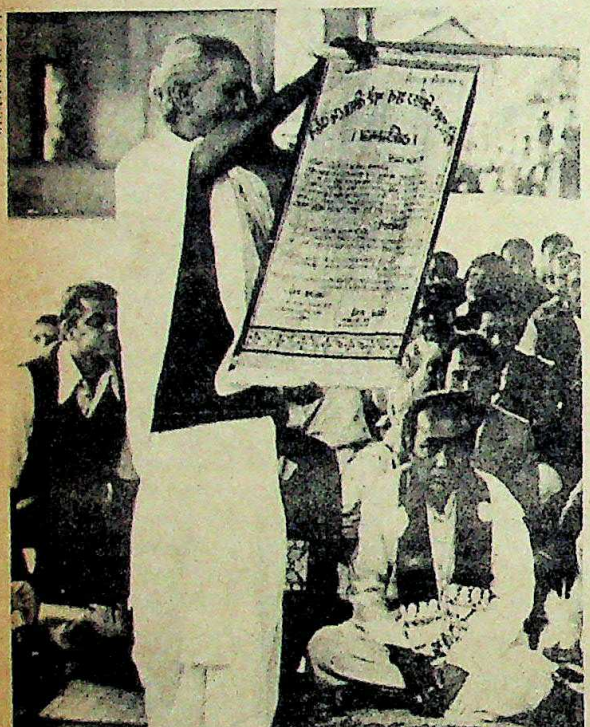
But even bureaucrats in Dispur admit that with the other side boycotting the inquiry it will be a totally drab affair. And perhaps the only entertainment will be provided by the insecure bureaucrats and police officers many of whom have been refusing to go out of the state on even better postings out of the fear that the "others" will "fix" them in the inquiry in their absence.

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live in the sprawling *char* areas. It will be impossible for anyone within the 3 km radius of these to complain." Adds AASU General Secretary Bhrigu Phukan: "We feel the tribunals have been formed to legitimise and confirm the foreigners' stay in India and not to deport them."

From the mood at a number of AASU meetings last month it was obvious that the agitators were in no mood to cooperate with the tribunals. Said Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal leader Indrajit Barua: "The problem is Saikia is trying to do too much to gain legitimacy and doing so much damage in the bargain. The state would have been better off with someone like Gogoi who would have treaded more cautiously without exposing his flanks".


SHEKHAR GUPTA

Saikia (right) at a *satra*: effective groundwork

Goodwill Campaign: But unmindful of the "exposed flanks" and rather disappointed by his tribunals experiment, Saikia was also in the midst of a desperate attempt to win credibility elsewhere last month. Following in the footsteps of his "supreme leader" in Delhi, Saikia had shrewdly begun visiting the major Vaishnavite *satras* (monasteries) and was surprised by the ease with which he secured a welcome in most, including the Kamalabari *satra* in upper Assam and, most important of all, the *satra* at Batadrava near Nowgong, the birthplace of the medieval Vaishnavite saint Sankardeva whose teachings most Assamese follow.

After a bit of groundwork by district officials and police Saikia not just succeeded in being welcomed by the *satradhikar* (head priest) Mahendrachandra Debomahanta but also collected a scroll of honour which he now proudly displays in his office. Said Congress(I) legislator Jiba Kanta Gogoi: "The chief minister's strategy of winning over the *satradhikars* will succeed. Most Assamese, except the Brahmins, follow them." But, complained an upset Bhrigu Phukan: "This is not what people expect from *satradhikars*. They remain confined within the *satras* and get misled. In fact we expect them to come out and mobilise the people."

Taking his public relations drive even further, Saikia on the same day addressed a public meeting organised by Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Hind at the Nowgong Idgah, following up his rather well-attended public meeting in the immigrant-dominated border town of Dhubri. But he has also made grave errors of judgement like dictatorially closing down two government schools in his home town of Nazira in upper Assam when students boycotted his public meeting on November 18. Schools were reopened last fortnight as AASU activists moved the courts but Saikia claims it was done after students and their parents apologised in writing, pleading that they were misled by extraneous elements. The chief minister added assertively: "Maybe it is bad publicity for me. But it will be good in the long run. I must tell them I am really a tough administrator."

Muslim Card: Even if not exactly a tough administrator Saikia was certainly proving to be a tough campaigner in the realm of realpolitik. In his battle of wits with AASU the Muslim card was still his trump and last month for once he seemed poised to exploit it to the hilt. He used Nurul Hussain, the estranged former vice-president of AASU into launching a campaign of sorts against AASU's Hindu leadership following the alleged discovery of the body of Rafiqul Islam, a Muslim student at Hajo, a mixed township 30 km north-west of Gauhati. But the campaign fizzled out as, sensationally, Islam surfaced a week after he was "buried", leaving police wondering as to whose decomposed body had been buried instead. Said one of Saikia's dissident cabinet colleagues: "At the end of this he must have realised that it will really not pay to play cat and mouse with the agitators over such trifles. He will have to show results elsewhere. The strongest and the most effective AASU argument against him is the failure of the tribunals."

But there was nothing to indicate a sudden sense of urgency in the Government's approach to this key factor to which the whole process of detection and deportation of foreigners as also Saikia's survival are linked. And no one knows the implications better than the diminutive Ahom leader from upper Assam.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Gau

KERALA

Timely Moves

IT WAS clearly a mission to prop up a tottering ministry. Mrs Gandhi's brief one-day air dash to Kerala last fortnight has scuttled the Opposition's claims of the imminent collapse of the Karunakaran Ministry and given the Congress (I)-led coalition government a new lease of life.

For in spite of earlier denials, Mrs Gandhi confirmed that the chief minister's "mysterious secret trips to Bombay were in connection with some party work". She also said that he undertook visits in deference to "requests from the party president", and described the Opposition charges as "hollow showing what little they have to say". Above all, the prime minister assured firmly: "The coalition will survive."

Mrs Gandhi flew into Trivandrum straight after the Calcutta plenary session purportedly to attend the concluding function of the golden jubilee celebrations of the Sree Narayana Guru Theerthadana (pilgrimage) at Sivagiri near Trivandrum. Sree Narayana Guru is the emancipator of the Ezhavas, the single largest Hindu community in the state. The chief minister and Mrs Gandhi used the occasion to woo the Ezhava electorate, traditionally CPI(M) supporters but now by virtue of the complexities of Kerala politics, the Socialist Republican Party, the political wing of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalan Yogam, is a member of the ruling front. Mrs Gandhi acceded to their persistent demand that Sree Narayana Jayanti, the birthday of the Ezhava leader be made a regional holiday for Central and state government employees in the state.

Toppling Bid: Meanwhile, the Opposition continued its bid to topple the Karunakaran Ministry. On the day of Mrs Gandhi's arrival, the CPI(M) newspaper *Desabhimani* carried an open letter to the prime minister: "You are visiting Kerala at a time when charges of corruption against those in

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When cooking with cheese, our chef wouldn't touch sweet wines in his cellar. For serving with a cheese soufflé, his selection would be dry and red. So also for pizzas and pastas. With cheese dips, a rosé. And with a quiche or a cheese foundue, dry and white.

You could always finish with Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*, as much a feast for the ears as Guido Reni's *Bacchus as a Child* is a feast for the eyes.

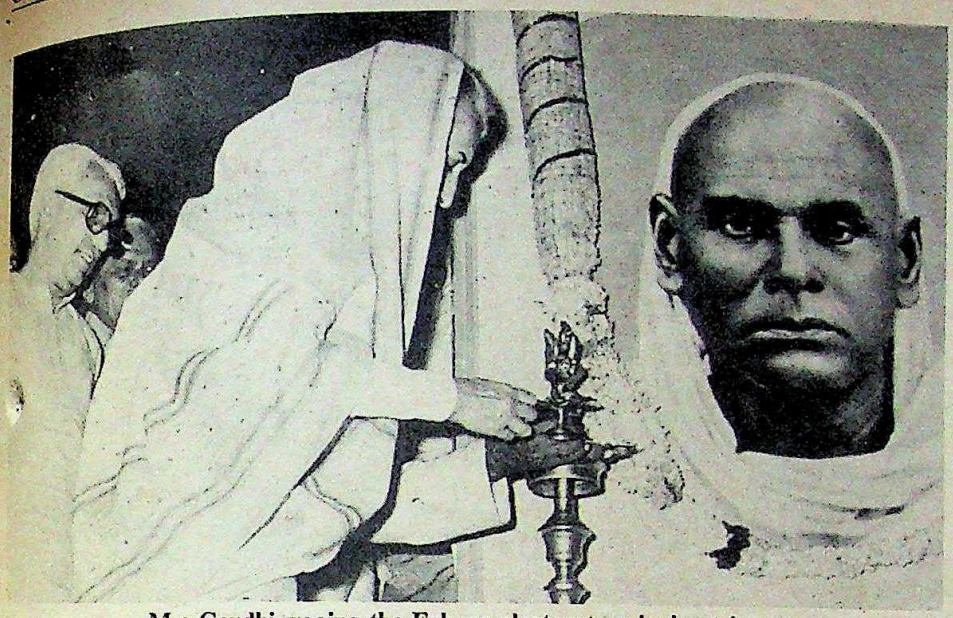
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Mrs Gandhi wooing the Ezhava electorate: winning trip

rity are pouring in like rain. Those who will not get drenched in this downpour are very few in the present ruling front." E.K. Nayanar, the leader of the Opposition claimed that his letter was a request for an inquiry or as part of an attempt to shape public opinion in this regard. In such an atmosphere, Mrs Gandhi's visit has served as a morale-booster to the crisis-ridden ministry.

Independent MLA's like V. Dinakaran and T.V. Vijayarajan, wooed back into the ruling coalition after they threatened to vote with the Marxists during the no-confidence motion, were given audience with the prime minister. But it was with the leaders of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), a partner in the coalition, that she spent the maximum time. The IUML was on the verge of moving over to the Opposition but due to her visit this action has been stalled.

For Ibrahim Sulaiman Sait MP and president of the IUML, and one of the most bitter critics of the ruling coalition had a change of heart. Sait has now not only cancelled his proposed trip to Calcutta for the conclave of opposition parties this month but has also said: "There is no threat from IUML to the Congress(I) front in Kerala."

After IUML's volte-face the CPI(M) General Secretary, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, who had earlier alleged that Sait had expressed a desire to opt out of the ruling front and join the broad union of opposition parties at the national level, said: "IUML was never invited to the Calcutta conclave because no party which has an exclusively communal base is proposed to be represented there." This may have been, as Sait thinks it to be, a matter of sour grapes as the Marxists had earlier tried several ways to woo the IUML.

Namboodiripad assessing the political situation said: "Like Antulay, Karunakaran is an embodiment of institutionalised corruption and is being shielded by the prime minister." He then pointed out that the CPI(M) was not in a hurry to bring down the Congress(I)-led coalition, which he predicted would fall by itself. —SREEDHAR PILLAI

TAMIL NADU

Double Role



JUST as an electoral alliance between the AIADMK and the Congress(I) appeared to be in the offing, the Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran, surprised everyone by completely reversing his party's stand. MGR's valedictory address last fortnight, at the four-day seminar on Centre-state relations organised by the Tamil Nadu Academy of Political Sciences was a diatribe against the Congress(I) and the gradual centralisation of all powers.

The chief minister said: "The Centre's tentacles have been slowly spreading over almost all the departments supposed to be controlled by the states. While earlier Congress leaders, at the time of Independence and during the Constituent Assembly sessions, had envisaged Central control only of the residual powers left behind by the states, we, the states, take the left-overs now. Please remember that the people who have elected the state governments are the same people who have elected the Central Government. Efforts to establish a single party government throughout the country would not be conducive to democracy."

At a time when the AIADMK's political leanings had become so apparent that they were no longer welcome to opposition party conclaves, the chief minister criticised the Congress(I)'s campaign against the so-called regional parties. The rap appeared really surprising, when Congress(I) leaders have been taking all care not to include the AIADMK in their campaign. At the end of the two-day regional conference in Madras on December 18, C.M. Stephen, the party general secretary, singled out N.T. Rama Rao and Ramakrishna Hegde for being "wrong in interpreting their election victories as a sanction for regionalism".

In spite of having time and again stressed the importance of national integration and a strong Centre, the seminar attended by about 70 people was financed by the state Government. Even according to the most conservative estimates, the air travel and local five-star expenses of out-station participants added up to around Rs 3 lakh. Though state ministers made themselves unavailable for comment, Dr C.A. Perumal, the convener and general secretary of the academy, said: "Apart from providing the money, the Tamil Nadu Government had no hand in the organisation of the show. We had earlier requested the Indian Council of Social Science Research and the University Grants Commission for support to the meet, but both declined. Our All-India Political Science Association also turned our request down for want of funds."

Interesting Reasons: Political observers have interesting explanations for the dual game MGR is playing. Remarked Kuldip Nayar, one of the journalist participants: "Having recently been awarded a doctorate by Madras University, MGR also possibly wanted to hob-nob with the intellectuals." Observed a former IAS officer and a local participant at the seminar: "MGR now wants to tell the Congress(I) that his AIADMK cannot be taken for granted. Besides this, he also wants to establish his credibility among the leaders of the different regional parties. Both Hegde and Ramo Rao have already hosted such seminars".

However, M. Palaniyandi the Tamil Nadu Congress(I) committee president was very cautious in his comments and said: "I wouldn't like to react to the chief minister's speech because I don't have the full authentic text of it—but then our position on Centre-state relations has always been clear. Strong states do not make any meaning without a strong Centre. It is the unity of the country which is at stake now more than ever. It is therefore, a strong Centre which is the need of the hour."

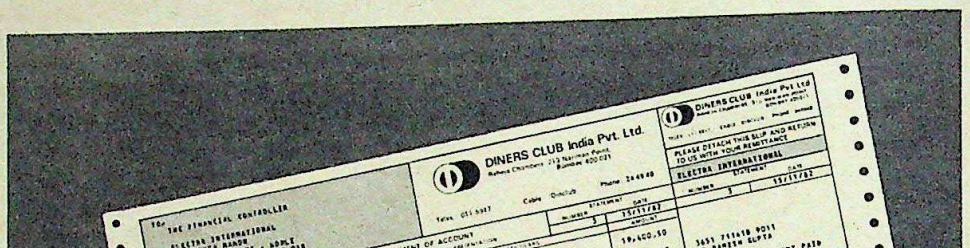
But none of this adequately explains the reason for the speech, for even though MGR criticises "the dual game the Congress(I) has been playing", he seems to be forgetting the nature of his own game.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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ANDHRA PRADESH

A Dramatic Escape



GREAT escapes are usually associated with murky tunnels and months of meticulous planning. But last fortnight, six Naxalites from the People's War Group (PWG), in a dramatic twist literally walked off with their 60-year-old leader, Kondapalli Seetaramiah, who had been remanded to judicial custody since his arrest in 1981. The bold operation was simplicity itself. Dressed as doctors and policemen, the rescue team walked in and out of the government-run Osmania General Hospital where he was being treated for chest pains, leaving behind a dead constable.

The ailing Seetaramiah, who doctors said was suffering from recurring ischaemic pains, is the leader of the PWG which has emerged as the foremost Naxalite group in Andhra Pradesh. His dramatic escape is expected to further bolster the PWG's image in the state—and for the police force his rearrest has become a prestige issue. Seetaramiah was first arrested by the police in Nagpur in 1977, but two years later he jumped bail until he was re-arrested in January 1981 as he tried to board a train at Begumpet. But during the two years before his arrest, he had established the PWG and pushed the less militant CPI (Marxist-Leninist) group led by Chandra Pulla Reddy into the background.

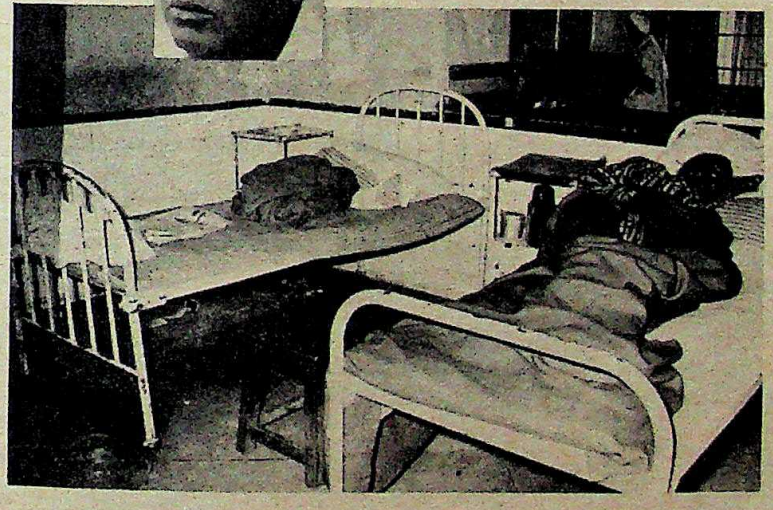
Bold Exit: Even though Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao quickly ordered a high level enquiry into the escape and the police embarked on a massive man-hunt, there were hardly any clues. A day before the escape, on January 3, Seetaramiah received a short telegram through the Mushirabad Central Jail authorities saying "father expired". Though Seetaramiah's father was no longer alive, the unsuspecting policemen never bothered to take down the sender's address. Only later, authorities realised that the telegram was a coded message preparing Seetaramiah for the rescue.

Seetaramiah was guarded by two policemen and was chained to his bed. Only when he went to the toilet was he freed, and on the fateful morning when Seetaramiah asked to visit the toilet, he was escorted by only one constable, Mohammed Ibrahim Khan, 23. Khan was quickly gunned down by the six Naxalites hiding in the toilet, and they whisked Seetaramiah off under the eyes of the hospital staff. When one sleepy watchman enquired where they were taking the patient, he was tersely told: "Back to jail."

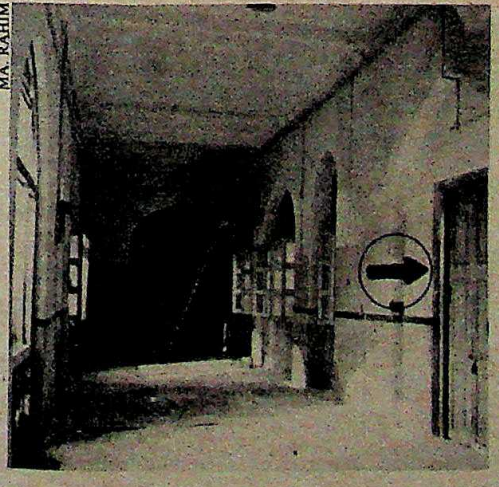
After Seetaramiah had flown the coop, the police went into action. They raided houses of suspected Naxalite sympathisers and arrested an undisclosed number of young men. A jeep cruising outside the hospital was seized along with the two men in it, but it turned out that they were real policemen who had come to Hyderabad from Warangal to investigate a case.

Even before Seetaramiah's escape, the PWG was not sitting idle. Of the 11 Naxalite killings in the state between January and August last year, the PWG was responsible for seven. Their slogan—'Kill if you must'—is in sharp contrast with the CPI(ML) group which believes in propaganda to spread their message and only resort to violence in 'selective actions as a defence'. Even though Reddy too is involved in underground activities, he has successfully evaded arrest and counts active fronts like the Progressive Democratic Students Union, Rythu Coolie Sanghams and the Revolutionary Writers Association among his supporters.





Seetaramiah (inset), his empty hospital bed (below) and (bottom) the door of the toilet where the policeman was shot



MA. RAHIM

Spreading Influence: Three years ago the PWG was mainly active in the district of Karimnagar, but now its influence extends over four states. Its first big success was in calling for a boycott of all elections after the 1980 Lok Sabha poll. While the CPI(ML) and other Naxalite groups participate in the elections, the PWG defiantly stays away. Though at the start of the decade, the total number of active Naxalites had dwindled to a few hundred, their number is now estimated at 3,000—the majority of them owing allegiance to Seetaramiah. Even the number of Naxalite killings have gone up sharply since then, with an average of 20-odd killings in a year.

As none of the charges against Seetaramiah was close to a verdict, the escape is surprising, for only prisoners expecting extreme sentences generally resort to such measures. Said K.G. Kannabiran, secretary of the People's Union of Civil Liberties: "Naxalites are not ordinary criminals applying for parole or the kind to sit twiddling their thumbs when they are not writing memoirs. They are political activists on the move."

Even Chief Minister Rama Rao seemed to concur. During his electioneering, he had called the Naxalites "true nationalists" at a public meeting at Khammam, and later he told the Assembly last year: "We cannot direct the police to shoot down Naxalites. We can only appeal to them to shed the path of violence and wait for mental transformation." But instead of speeding up the pending cases against 148 Naxalites detained in the state's jails for periods ranging from six months to two-and-a-half years, Rama Rao has only called in more battalions of the Central Reserve Police Force and set up an anti-Naxalite force with its headquarters in Warangal.

With Seetaramiah at large, the Naxalites are riding a new wave. Said Kannabiran: "Most cases are foisted against them (Naxalites) and as the police have no evidence, adjournments are repeatedly asked for and granted." For the police, that's like a red rag before a bull, and they have pulled out all stops in the hunt for the escapee, if only to avenge their evident humiliation.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

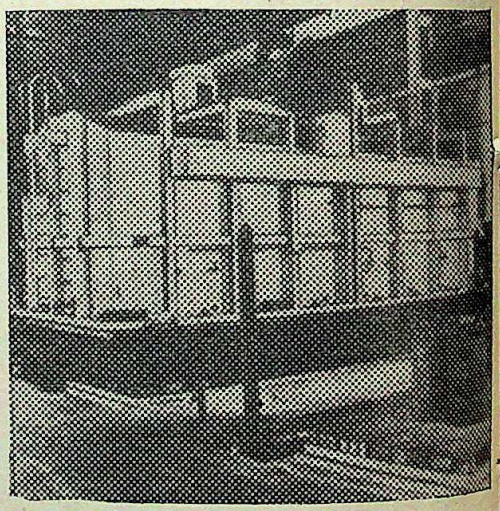
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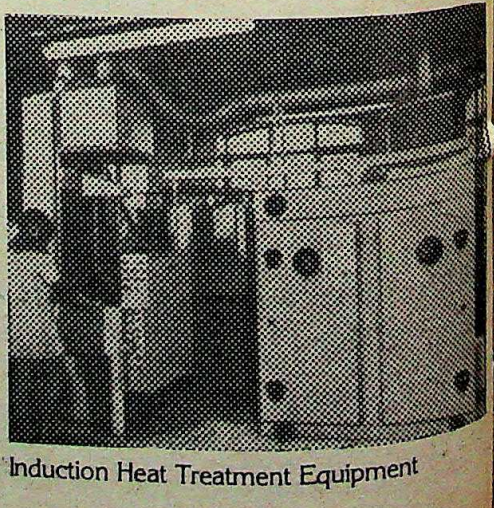
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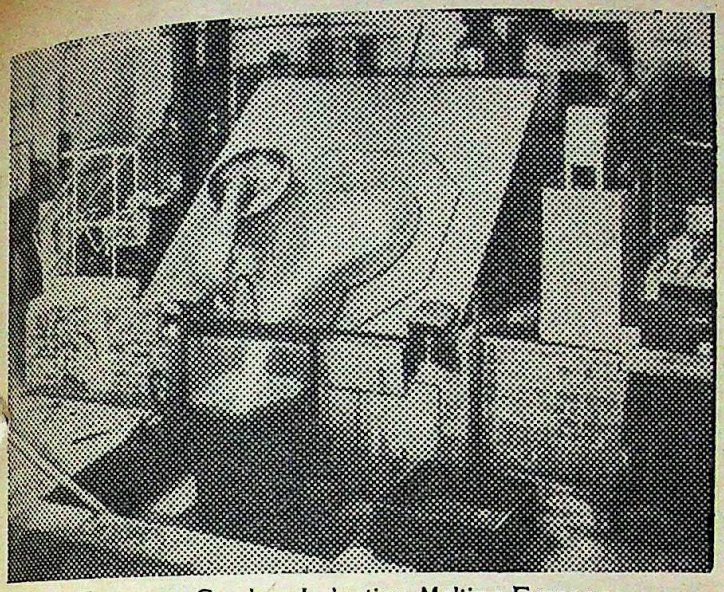
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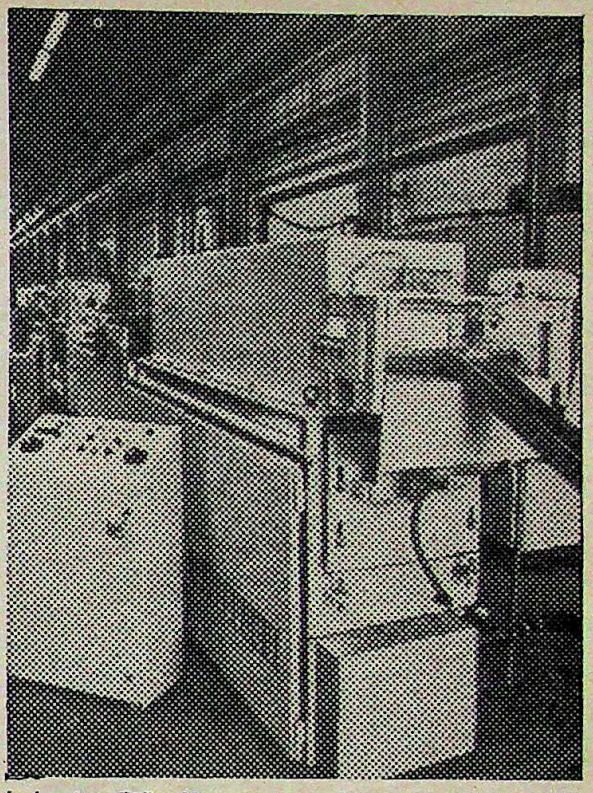
Induction Heat Treatment Equipment

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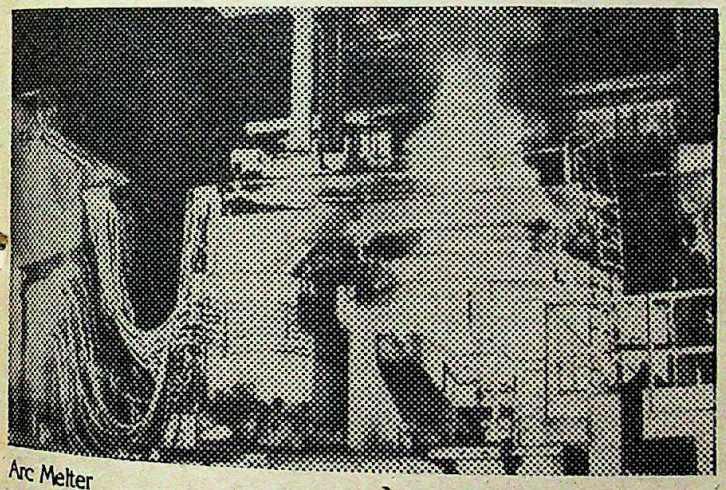
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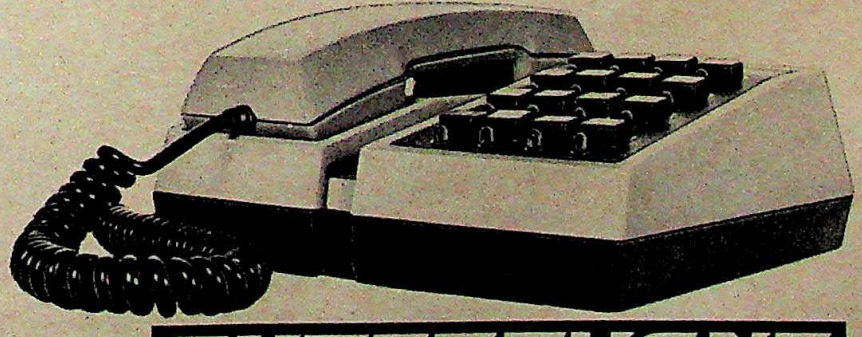
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CONVERSIONS

The Gulf Stream

BEING a poor Harijan boy in a small village of Tamil Nadu was getting 23-year-old Rajendran nowhere. No one was willing to give him a job despite relatively good educational qualifications nor was he treated with the respect and dignity due to any human being. So, a few months ago, Rajendran converted to Islam—and became Abdul Aziz. From there—going by the pattern set by other fellow converts—Rajendran hopes to get to Dubai and to a change in fortune.

The pattern is becoming much too familiar in some districts of Tamil Nadu—especially Ramanathapuram—and is slowly altering the composition of entire villages. Said Rajendran: "Three years ago, on April 14, 1981, there was a communal riot in Ramanathapuram where Nadars and Thevars (caste Hindus) suppressed us Harijans. Conversions are only after that."

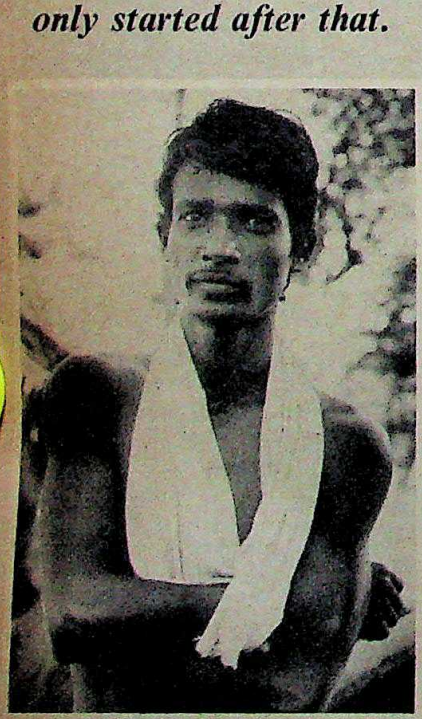
Another, and perhaps more powerful reason is that once converted, it is easy for these Harijans to move on to rich Gulf countries. Said Ismail, once known as Dinakaran: "Luckily my son Abdul Rehman could go to Dubai about three months ago. He is a matriculate. I don't know where he is working there, but he sends over a thousand rupees to us every month." Similarly Udayar's son Riaz from Kooriyur village, and Sirajuddin and Jamaal—all one-time Harijans—have made it to the Gulf during the last six months, each of them within weeks of switching over to Islam. All are regularly pumping money back home. Said Rajendran enthusiastically: "Why only Gulf, I'm available for all countries."

Social Inequality: The trend of Harijans converting to Islam started soon after the 1981 riots when 1,100 persons adopted Islam at Meenakshipuram, a sleepy pilgrim centre of Tamil Nadu. At about the same time, 70-odd families of Kooriyur village also adopted the new faith. The reason was the continuing discrimination against Harijans. Despite laws to the contrary, they were not allowed into many Hindu temples, they could not drink tea from certain tea-stalls and were not allowed to take water from wells in Thevar localities. Islam, they believed, would raise them from being wretched untouchables into respectable Muslims. At that time, BJP President Atal Behari Vajpayee had called Meenakshipuram "a danger signal".

But, for a while, then, there was a lull. Not many more Harijans converted to Islam and some converts even returned to the Hindu fold—till the second half of 1983, when another 30 families suddenly switched over to Islam. That short period changed the Hindu-dominated Kooriyur village into a Mulsim-dominated one. The movement shows signs of spreading to other villages of Ramanathapuram district—Athiyuthu, Melakottai and Seiyalur. About 60 to 80 per cent of the Harijans in these villages have embraced Islam.

Police Interference: Again and again, these converts point to police harassment as

Three years ago there was a communal riot in Ramanathapuram when we Harijans were suppressed by caste Hindus. Conversions have only started after that.



Rajendran (Abdul Aziz)

It was only police brutality which drove us to this step of conversion...now we have decided to earn some human respect by changing over to Islam.



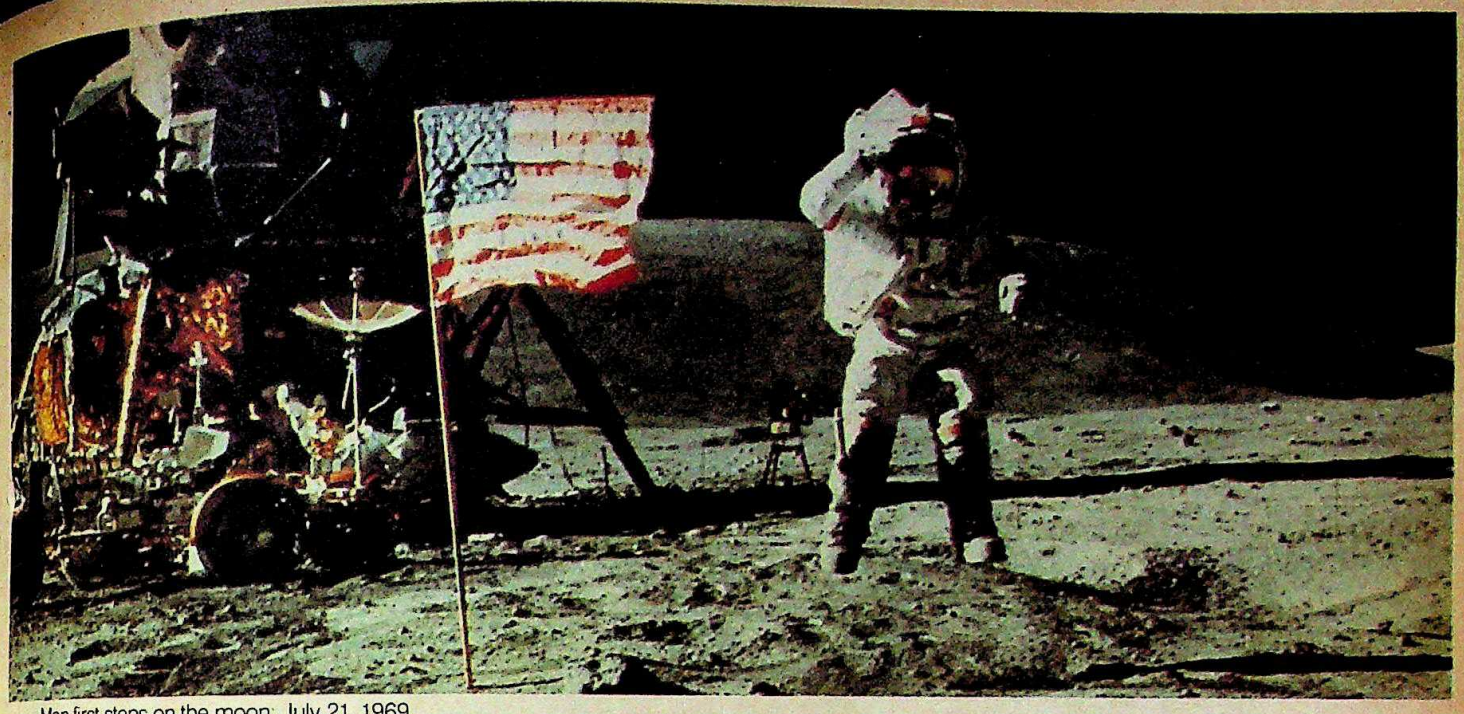
Nagarajan

We Harijans are now in minority... ours is a daily battle for survival...even we may have to convert because of relentless pressure.



Khader Mohammed

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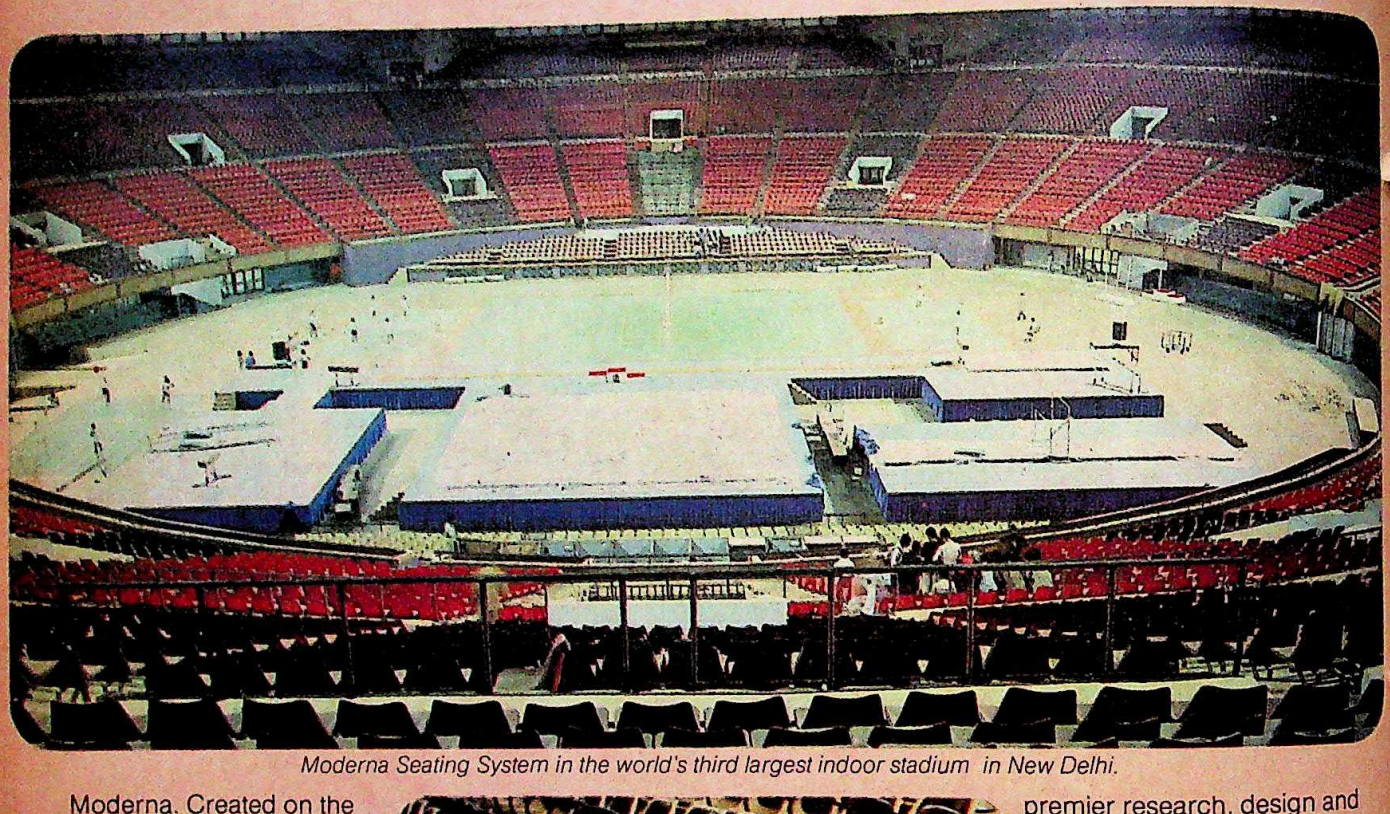
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the principal reason behind their change. Said Muniyandi, a young Harijan electrician from Kruvikkarathery: "No less than 68 families in our part of Ramanathapuram town have been unnecessarily involved by the police in criminal cases relating to the 1981 caste riots in which six Harijans were killed. We daily labourers have to trudge all the way to the magistrate's court every week. How can we afford to do that? Unless the police withdraw these foisted cases, very soon all of us will convert ourselves to Islam and maybe even manage to go abroad." Already 10 families of the 68 accused have converted.

Khader Mohammed of Melakottai has the same complaint. Said he: "It was only police brutality which drove us to this desperate step of conversion. Used to being picked up by the police at any time of day or night in the months following the riots, we had almost resigned ourselves to a life of terror. Our families had to live for days on end in the forests near our village in hopeless fear of the police. Now we have decided to earn some human respect by changing over to Islam."

THE CHANGE, although it has brought some financial relief and a greater measure of human dignity, has only exchanged one type of police harassment for another. Said Parthamma, a Harijan woman who has converted: "The police are after our blood even after we have changed our religion. Even now they intrude into our huts and ask intimidating and probing questions on why we have become Muslims."

Yet another pressure these converts face —and it is hardly surprising that they do—is from the unconverted Harijans themselves. Although they live in such close proximity, the two groups hardly talk to each other at all. The contrast in their life-styles is striking. The Harijan women roam around in tatters while their converted counterparts are richly dressed. The reason, of course, is the Dubai money. If that doesn't tempt more Harijans into embracing Islam, it will surely increase tensions between them.

Said Nagarajan, a young Harijan tiller from Kooriyur, angrily: "We Harijans are now in minority in Kooriyur and we are living in mortal fear. When our cattle, by mistake, trespass into their lands, they spout venom at us. Ours is a daily battle for survival. Even we may have to ultimately convert because of relentless pressure." S.K. Vel, the leader of the non-converts is equally disturbed. Said he: "There is a new temple of Lord Muruga being constructed in the village estimated to cost Rs 60,000. While we eagerly look forward to its completion, these Muslim fogeys taunt us saying nobody will remain to worship at the temple, implying that the whole village will embrace Islam in a matter of time."

Growing Trend: It is the same story in the other villages. Over the last few months, about 80 of the 100 Harijan families of Athiyuthu village have embraced Islam, 35 out of the 50 Harijan families of Melakottai, and 20 of the 65 Harijan families of Seiyalur. Even according to conservative official estimates, some 224 Harijans have adopted Islam in Ramanathapuram district during the last few months of 1983 compared to the 186 during the whole of 1982.

Although the statistics may not be that spectacular for a district with a Harijan population of 6 lakh—of whom 7 per cent are original Muslims—it shows every sign of increasing. Already, over 60 relatively well-educated young Harijan converts have landed lucrative Gulf jobs in the last few months alone and are regularly sending their poor agricultural families about Rs 1,000 a month. Most are between 22 and 35 years old and have completed matriculation in an area where education usually stops at the fourth or fifth standard.

Observed K. Paramalai, a Harijan member of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly: "Conversions seem to have become some kind of a definite movement now. It is not any more a sudden spurt like what happened in Meenakshipuram. There is a definite design behind these current conversions."

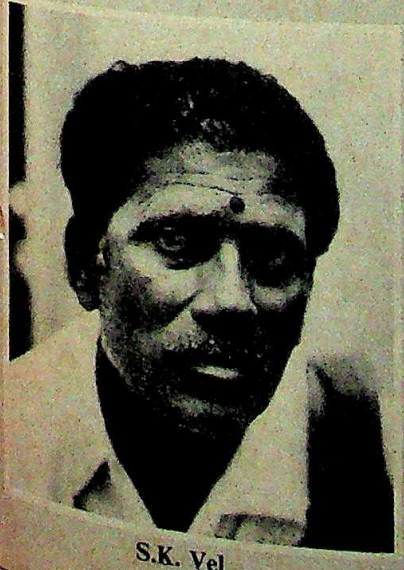
Helpless Reaction: And, sure enough, caste Hindus are worried. Said Navaneethakrishnan, a caste Hindu landlord of Athiyuthu village: "We are trying desperately to keep the non-converts in the Hindu fold. But I don't know what is going to happen." And said Vandemataram Krishna Rao, an Arya Samaj leader: "Certainly Gulf jobs and money are the motivating factors behind the conversions. It is really a very frightening trend."

There is not much the police—or anyone for that matter—can do, since conversion is no crime. Said a police official of the district: "These local agents for Middle East jobs are rather shrewd operators. They have no address, no office, nothing. They just visit these villages occasionally and pick up converts to give them jobs. We know all this, but it is very difficult to prove."

After preliminary investigations, the Deputy Inspector General of Police, C. Veeraraghavan, has submitted a report to the Union Government. Said he: "We have tried to establish a nexus between the change of religion and Gulf jobs." Added Superintendent of Police K. Ramalingam: "Even if allurement can be definitely proved, it wouldn't constitute a crime. Conversion by itself is neither a crime nor a law and order problem at all, and the state has no right to intervene if an individual changes his religion for material or spiritual reward." If anywhere, the reason why these young men are going abroad can be best found at home.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

"These Muslims taunt us....implying that the whole village will embrace Islam in a matter of time."



S.K. Vel

"Conversions seem to have become a definite movement now...there is a definite design behind them."



K. Paramalai

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N.T. RAMA RAO

Playing to the Gallery

THE MAN was in his element. Hyderabad's saucer-shaped Lal Bahadur Shastri Stadium packed to capacity, a prominently located dais bathed in spotlight, and a frenzied crowd of adulators shouting "NTR zindabad! Telugu Desam zindabad!"

Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao, universally known as NTR, celebrated the first anniversary of his government last fortnight in the only style to which he is accustomed: the theatrical. Hands folded, head bowed in uncharacteristic modesty, he worked his way through a 55-minute prepared text with the practised intonation of the film star he once was. His voice, severely damaged during the hectic election campaign which catapulted him to power, is still hoarse, but has lost little of its fire.

Dressed in the saffron he likes to be seen in, but devoid of the solitary earring he hung from his left ear for several months, NTR delivered a message which confirmed that he has yet to really leave behind the world of make-believe from which he emerged, like a Krishna on the war- path, just 12 months ago.

Populist Sops: The high point of his celebration was to give his people a gift which might earn him quick popularity but promised to set his government already running short on cash, back by another Rs 100 crore. In one stroke, among other things he announced the abolition of land revenue, free bus rides for schoolchildren younger than 12, and a Rs 50 monthly pension for widows with an annual income of under Rs 1,800. Treading on delicate ground, he also announced the establishment of a minorities' finance corporation and the acceptance of the controversial Mandal Commission's report on backward classes which seeks the reservation of 27 per cent of jobs for the underprivileged.

Describing NTR's actions as "populism gone berserk", the normally sedate *Times of India* thundered: "The new measures, if implemented, will tear the state's fragile social fabric apart, push the exchequer deeper into the red and cripple the existing administrative machinery at the taluka and village level."

If the comment was intemperate it was largely because populism has become a hallmark of NTR's year in office. One of his ministry's first decisions was to launch a Rs 2-a-kg rice scheme (state subsidy: currently more than Rs 100 crore) to some 1.08 crore families with an annual income of under Rs 6,000. He followed this up by copying neighbouring Tamil Nadu and introducing free midday meals for 37 lakh schoolchildren in the 6 to 11 age group at a cost of Rs 50 crore.

Attractive Doles: Other achievements listed are of similar hues. They include:

- ► the construction of some 1.40 lakh pucca houses at a cost of Rs 88 crore;
- ► a ban on capitation fee in the state's private engineering and medical colleges;
- ► a 30 per cent job reservation for women and legislation to give them such rights as equal wages and property inheritance on par with men.

Populism comes naturally to a man who throughout his working life has lived on his image, who won a massive popular mandate on the strength of the image, and who raised such tremendous expectations at the time of his victory. Jaded with the Congress(I)'s perennial infighting, the clumsy hiring and firing of chief ministers and perceived neglect of their interest, the voters of Andhra Pradesh fell gratefully into the arms of the man who said he would restore their pride and rid the state of its ineffective, squabbling, shifting leadership which was more beholden to the mistress of 1, Safdarjung Road rather than the people who elected it to office.

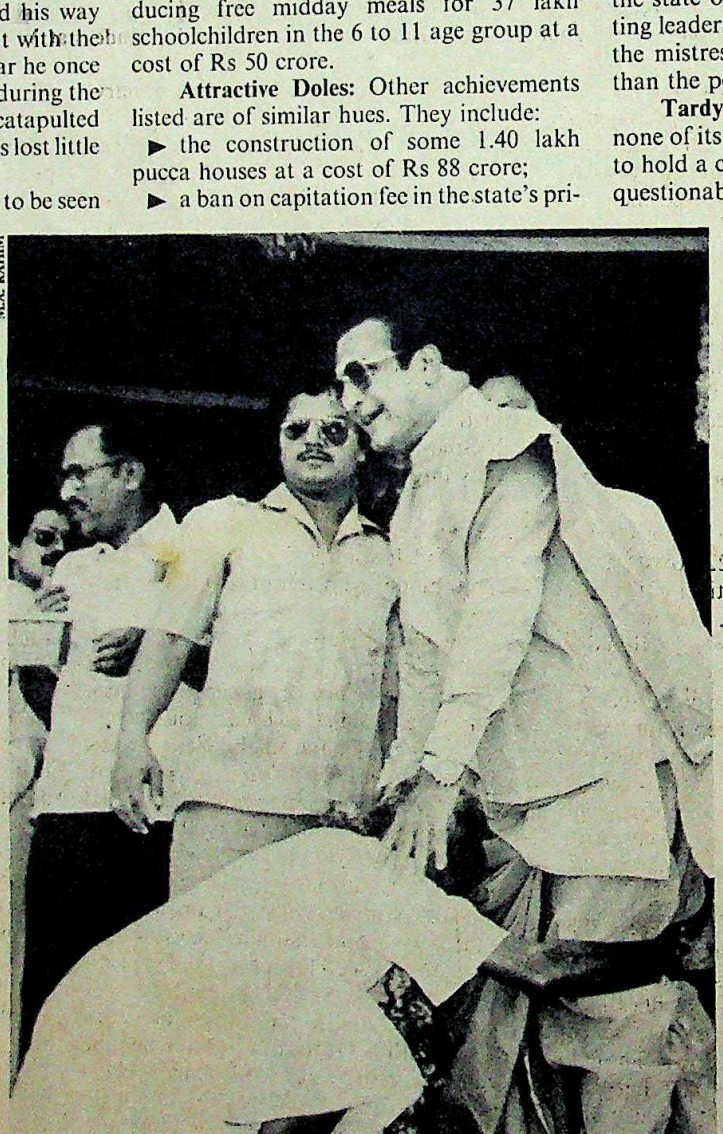
Tardy Progress: The image has lost none of its glitter. Nobody has yet been able to hold a candle to it. What has emerged questionable in the past one year is the fame film actor's painfully slow conversion into a politician. "NTR is a good man," says Marri Chenna Reddy, who ruled Andhra Pradesh firmly as a Congress(I) chief minister till Prime Minister Indira Gandhi unceremoniously ejected him from office in 1980, "but that's not enough, you've got to be a good administrator too."

While there's no dearth of adulation, such experience as has gained has come the hard way. New Delhi, which has gone out of its way not to comment on NTR for fear of alienating a potential electoral ally, hasn't helped with funds or much cooperation. And several of NTR's novel measures have all too easily become bogged down in administrative and legal problems, showing them up to be somewhat naive in conception and implementation. Says one senior bureaucrat who wishes to remain unidentified: "No serious thinking is being put into bold decisions. If only they had been well thought out and executed with finesse they would have been historic."

Among such decisions can be counted:

- A decision last February to reduce the retirement age of government employees from 58 to 55. Understandably, this evoked great resistance, and some of the 30,000 people who

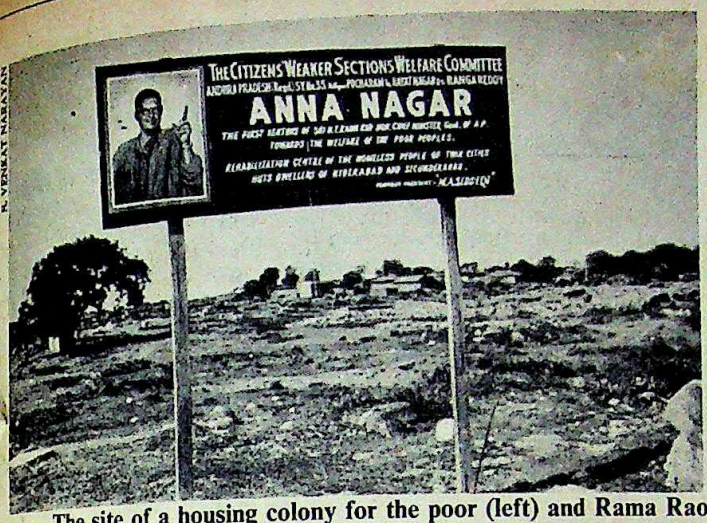
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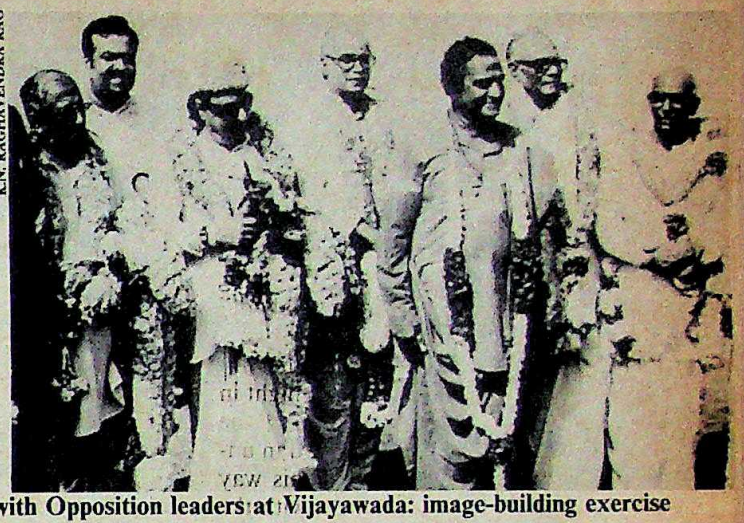


Rama Rao with an admirer: charismatic leadership

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The site of a housing colony for the poor (left) and Rama Rao with Opposition leaders at Vijayawada: image-building exercise

their jobs challenged the decision in the Supreme Court whose verdict is imminent.

• A vote last March in the state Assembly to dissolve the legislative council, just as West Bengal and Punjab dissolved theirs in 1969 and 1970 respectively. The move continues to be resisted by the Union Law Ministry.

• An order to the wealthy trust of the Tirupati temple, the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, which has assets of over Rs 150 crore, to deposit some of its funds with the Government treasury at Chittoor or Tirupati last February. The idea was to use the funds for development but the trustees refused, and the issue is in court.

• The reorganisation of 48 state corporations into 34 governed by 22 boards of directors to cut down on political patronage and perquisites to politicians. The order was also challenged in court and ten months later remains a scrap of paper.

In spite of these clumsy set-backs, NTR's record could have been a lot worse than it is. He came to office, as he put it, a one-man show. His party, the Telugu Desam, was no more than a collection of individuals standing for election. The party today boasts 16 lakh members, short of the 25 lakh target for the first year—and its organisation reaches down to the village level. The only tremor of the factionalism that bedevils so many other parties came briefly from state Finance Minister Nadedla Bhaskara Rao whose ambition to be named second in command was shot down. Though rumours surface from time to time that Rao may break away, he staunchly denies any such possibility.

Cankers Within: The twin cancers of political parties—corruption and nepotism—threaten slightly more ominously. Clean government was one of NTR's main election planks, and Finance Minister Rao claims: "We have been able to check political corruption." No funds are collected from industrialists, says another top party functionary, one-time party treasurer Tatineni Prakasha Rao, because "they will expect favours from us in return."

At lower levels, corruption continues unabated and NTR himself admits to an inability to check it (*see interview*). And there are growing whispers concerning the rising authority of NTR's own relatives whose role in party affairs has become high profile. One of the main charges was made against the eldest of his seven sons, Jayakrishna, who wanted to convert the family's Ramakrishna Cine Studios in the crowded Musheerabad locality into two theatres. The Government cleared the project, but last month after much mud-slinging between the Telugu Desam and its political opponents, Jayakrishna thought the better of it and withdrew the idea.

Powerful Relatives: There are also murmurings that NTR's sons-in-law wield undesirable influence on government decision-making though they hold no public office. One of them, Chandrababu Naidu, was a minister in the last two Congress(I) governments before NTR came to power. Defeated in the election and admitted to the Telugu Desam, he spends several hours every morning at NTR's official residence talking to visitors and party legislators. "I am not a politician, only a businessman," says Naidu, but is unable to scotch rumours of his participation in party and official affairs.

Another son-in-law, Venkateswara Rao, was with NTR the day he launched the Telugu Desam in March 1982. Amidst charges of nepotism he was last year made convenor of Telugu Yuvata, the party's youth wing, and returned to the Assembly by a reduced margin in the by-election from Martur last November. There is speculation that he may be inducted into the Cabinet later this month. "It is entirely up to him (NTR) how he wants to utilise my services," says Venkateswara Rao coyly.

Jayakrishna, Naidu and Rao can be found at NTR's official residence almost every morning. They are also known to be present in the chief minister's room when policy matters come up for discussion, and NTR has a habit of asking for their opinions.

NONE of this appears to divert the chief minister himself from his appointed task. NTR remains untouched by controversy, replete with a sense of reassurance which derives from his still undimmed public following. But this source of strength ironically is also a potential weakness, for it fuels what a number of those who have seen him at close quarters feel is an authoritarian streak.

He has yet to master the intricacies of the bureaucracy, is impatient with rules and precedents and cannot see why something he wants done cannot be done fast. In a moment of exasperation he once told one of his close advisors: "Back in the film industry, if I said in the morning that I wanted a certain thing done by the evening, it would be done. How come it takes so long to get anything done in the Government?"

The chief minister tends to be self-righteous and is convinced that he acts only in the larger interest of the people. Thus, he is not given to consulting people—not many among his own colleagues, let alone those in the Opposition. "He doesn't bother to consult us on even major issues," complains Devireddy Suryaprakasha Reddy of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Since he sees no virtue in cultivating the press, he gets a bad one. Most newspapers in the state are critical of him, but then they are owned by Congress(I) supporters. The only exception is the *Eenadu* newspaper which played a central role during his election campaign. Says Editor-in-Chief Ramoji Rao: "It's true that he has made quite a few silly mistakes. It is still not too late for him to mend his ways. If he does that, you can re-

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INTERVIEW

"I am swimming against odds"

ONE YEAR in office seems to have mellowed N.T. Rama Rao considerably. Even though he appears to be reluctantly coming to terms with political realities he has lost none of his cherished drive to improve the lot of the people he governs. Last fortnight, Senior Editor S. VENKAT NARAYAN *and Hyderabad Correspondent* AMARNATH K. MENON *met the chief minister for an hour-long interview. Excerpts:*

Q. ***How do you look back on your performance as chief minister during your first year in office?***

A. I have done what I wanted to. We have followed our party's policies.

Q. ***Are you satisfied with what you have been able to do?***

A. I'm swimming against many odds. I have done what I could. It is for the people to give their verdict. They are the masters and I their servant. They gave me a mandate and I'm working for them.

Q. ***What have been your important achievements?***

A. Selling rice at Rs 2 a kilo. Building houses for the poor. Providing drinking water to every village with a population of 100 people or more. Abolition of capitation fee in medical and engineering colleges. A university for women. Legislation giving equal rights to women. Reserving 30 per cent of the jobs for women from this month.

Q. ***What have been your notable failures?***

A. I have failed in rooting out corruption. I do want to create a society that's free of corruption. But it is not entirely in my hands. Procedures have to be followed to punish the corrupt. It takes time. But I'm not giving up my fight against corruption. I'll fight it till the last day of my life. Whether I'll succeed or not, I don't know. Only time will tell.

Q. ***Any other failures?***

A. Well, I can't call them failures, really. I consider them failures in the sense that I haven't been able to implement certain things as fast as I wanted to.

Q. ***Talking to people throughout the state, one gets the impression that people are impressed by your sincerity to do something for them. But they seem to feel that you do not quite know how to go about it.***

A. I am quite sure of what I want to do. It's taking time for the people to understand my way of doing things. A day will come soon when I'll have everything done according to my plans.

Q. ***To achieve quick results you seem to be taking major decisions in haste, only to repent at leisure.***

A. I'm not repenting for anything; my decisions are not hasty. I discuss everything with my colleagues before taking a decision. I can't be the only one to be blamed if something goes wrong. I'm only the policy maker. The implementation is not in my hands. If the policies are bad, I am answerable. If the implementation is bad, it's the bureaucracy that has to answer.

Q. ***Take the use of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) funds for developmental purposes. The idea is good. If only you took the TTD board into confidence, the litigation could have been avoided.***



NTR: "I have done what I wanted to"

A. I don't want to do anything behind closed doors. I want to run an open government. The people of this state have put their confidence in me. I want to do good for them. Let them understand me, it may take time. If I take a wrong step, let them say so and I'll accept it.

Q. ***The Rs 2 a kilo rice scheme seems to be the most popular of your measures so far. But there have been some complaints about the quality.***

A. The Mussoorie variety, now being sold, is better than the Akkulu variety that was being sold earlier. The quality is good. However, some people in the villages have said that they would prefer *jonnalu* (maize) to rice. We have made arrangements to supply maize in tribal areas.

Q. ***How is the mid-day meal scheme working?***

A. It's doing quite well in some districts and not so well in others. It is meant mainly for the poor children who go to school. The aim is good; so, it will be accepted. The scheme is not working well in areas where the panchayats are controlled by the Congress(I). No matter which party controls the panchayats, I appeal for help and cooperation because it's a good scheme, meant to feed poor children who will otherwise go hungry. One day I hope it will work well all over the state. I can't help it if a good scheme fails because it can't be implemented properly. A day will come when all the children will be fed and be happy.

Q. ***Having been elected democratically in a landslide victory, how come you are resorting to running the state by ordinances? You have already issued about 30 ordinances.***

A. I am not in favour of ordinances. It was out of necessity that these ordinances were issued. I wanted to implement certain things; I had no other alternative.

Q. ***During your election campaign you had criticised Mrs Gandhi for encouraging Sanjay and Rajiv. People thought you won't encourage dynastic tendencies yourself. How do you explain the role of your son and sons-in-law in your political life?***

A. My sons are not politicians. They are minding their own business. My first son and the second boy are looking after my theatres. My third boy is looking after the studio, the fourth one is a cinematographer. My fifth boy is an actor, the sixth one is in the US and the last one is a student. They are not politicians. Even if you pay them Rs 50,000 a month, they won't come (into politics). I suppose, because people hold NTR in high esteem, some people want to throw mud on him. But I don't care. I'm not bothered about criticism. I'm keeping quiet. The people are better judges.

Q. ***What about the sons-in-law?***

A. Dr Venkateswara Rao has been in politics before I became the chief minister. He was there during the election campaign. He was there right from the inception of Telugu Desam. He gave up his medical studies to be at my side at that time. He had been my son-in-law at that time too. Now, the people of Martur have voted for him. Chandrababu Naidu (the other son-in-law) too has been in politics before I entered the scene. But I haven't given him any post.

Q. ***In the Ramayana, when a washer-***

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man expressed doubts about Sita's chastity, Rama banished her into the jungle.

A. Yes, Rama was magnanimous. So am I. I banished all my children away from here and I am living alone in this house. How many sons of politicians haven't been themselves in politics in this country? But I am not like the others. I follow what I say. I'm not giving any chance to anybody to get at me. I'm not using my power for anything personal.

Q. *Are you saying that none of your relations is playing any role in your political life?*

A. Absolutely.

Q. *You seem to have alienated civil servants by reducing their retirement age.*

A. I can't blame anybody. It will take them some time to understand and execute my policies. All I can say is: I know there is no prejudice. The bureaucracy is with me.

Q. *Your decision making process is peculiar. You take important decisions and the concerned ministers and secretaries know nothing about it.*

A. This isn't true either. You see, I am answerable for all my decisions. But I take them only after consulting my colleagues.

Q. *The non-Congress(I) opposition groups say you don't bother to consult them even on major issues.*

A. I do consult them. Maybe I should do it more often.

Q. *You have been complaining rather loudly about stepmotherly treatment by the Centre. Do you think Mrs Gandhi is singling you out for special discrimination?*

A. Money is the most vital thing for successfully implementing all the schemes. I'm concerned with the developmental and social welfare programmes of my state. When a natural calamity hits my state can I not expect some help from outside? When I am sinking in water, I expect you as a friend to pull me out and not see me killed.

Q. *People say that you are impatiently waiting to become the prime minister.*

A. There isn't anything like that. Was I expected to become a chief minister before the assembly election? I don't expect to be anything. But, if God determines, I can be anything.

Q. *You have stopped sporting the diamond ear-drop. Are you planning to shed your saffron robes too?*

A. I want to keep myself pure in the eyes of the public. I want them to know that I am above all petty things and evils like corruption. Why did Swami Vivekananda wear saffron robes? Why did Mahatma Gandhi wear loincloth? To tell the people that they are above want, corruption and so on. You should set an example to the people at large by your behaviour, your attire and your endeavour.

Q. *Is that why you want to continue wearing the saffron clothes?*

A. These clothes create a thrill. If what I wear gives thrills to the people, I'll do so many things! I'm happy to see that people attach so much importance to what I wear. Tomorrow I may wear a gold button or a gold pin!

Q. *It has been your ambition to play the role of Srinatha, the famous Telugu poet, in a film.*

A. I have so many ambitions, yet to be fulfilled. One day I want to see God, too. You see, it's the film industry which brought me recognition first. Whatever I may be in life now, I cannot forget this fact. I haven't taken any decision as yet. But, for the present, I am not going to act. I may do that role when I find time.

Q. *Congress(I) leaders say that your popularity has eroded considerably and that, in the Lok Sabha election, they will win a majority of the 42 seats in the state.*

A. I can't talk so cheaply as they are doing. Let them prove themselves and I'll prove myself.

Q. *You have no plans to concede any seats to the non-Congress(I) opposition groups in the coming Lok Sabha election.*

A. I'll fight in all the constituencies.

Q. *Is it true that you don't trust people? Or, is it that it's difficult to get people in whom you can trust?*

A. To get a friend is very difficult. It was Duryodhana's good fortune that he found a good disciple and friend like Karna who stood by him through thick and thin and eventually laid down his life for him. If I get someone like that, I will welcome him, do *pranam* to him and embrace him.

Q. *Have you found a Karna.*

A. Someone may come my way some day. Why be so cynical?

Q. *Your critics say that you have been favouring many people from your own Kamma community with positions of power and that you run a Kamma Raj.*

A. This is a Telugu Raj, not a Kamma Raj. To start a Kamma Raj I need not have sacrificed everything and come here. I belong to all the six crore Telugu people. My caste is Telugu, my religion is Telugu and I am a Telugu man.

Q. *What lessons have you learnt from this one year's experience in office?*

A. What I have learnt is: Speak less, work more.

Q. *So you admit you have been talking too much?*

A. That's why this is my new year resolution!

assured that it will take a really long time for Mrs Gandhi's party to stage a come-back in these parts."

Securely Positioned: That could well be true, for the party has in seven by-elections yielded just one seat (to the BJP in Hyderabad early last year) and its electoral ally, the Rashtriya Sanjay Manch lost another to the Congress(I) at Peddapalli in 1983 end. But the losses were in the traditionally Congress(I)-dominated areas of Telangana. Congress(I) workers, on the other hand, are beginning to raise their heads after the humiliation of January 1983. Says Jalagam Vengala Rao, Congress(I) chief minister during the Emergency: "Doles solve no problems, they only perpetuate poverty. He (NTR) seems to think he is an *avatara purusha* (incarnation). He is a bogus *sanyasi*, out to cheat gullible people. He is the 20th century's version of Mohammed Bin Tughlak."

Though Rao fell out with Mrs Gandhi, his animus is typical of the general Congress(I) sentiment towards the man who cut them to size. It could be fuelled by a sense of impotent anger. The star has a long way to travel before it falls. From Andhra Pradesh, he has moved on to the national stage and attracted to him the mass of rudderless opposiion factions.

NTR's dramatic emergence a year ago was quickly followed up by his leading roles in the Vijayawada opposition conclave, the follow-up in Srinagar and the southern chief ministers meet in Bangalore.

Shrewd Calculations: NTR is too shrewd to hitch his bandwagon to a losing cause, and will keep all options open even as he goes about trying to cement the opposition fragments into a monolith. But his role in opposition unity will be catalytic for he has no intention of giving up any constituency to potential allies, having announced his intention to contest all the 42 Lok Sabha seats in the state.

That is only the most visible measure of NTR's self-confidence as he enters his second year of office, apparently invincible in electoral battle. For at the moment he is his own only credible foe. While the Congress(I) continues to lick its wounds, it is the Himalayan expectations he aroused at the time of his election that could be his downfall. Coming as he did capturing more than two-thirds of the Assembly seats, with the image of a saviour, NTR will have to deliver more than he has so far done.

He started with enormous goodwill, but goodwill is also a volatile commodity. Only if he comes up with performance to retain it will NTR continue to remain what he is right now, the most secure chief minister in the land.

—S. VENKAT NARAYAN and AMARNATH K. MENON in Hyderabad

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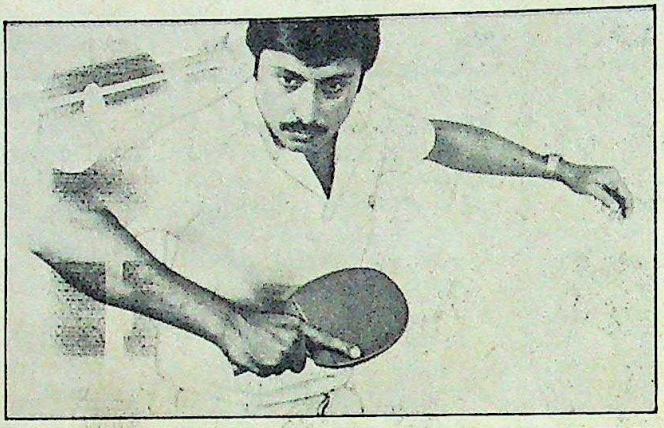
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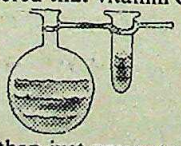
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CONGRESS(I)

Gearing for the Polls

IT WAS freezing cold outside, and the tree-lined Akbar Road in New Delhi was deserted in the January evening. It was only at the headquarters of the All India Congress Committee(I) (AICC-I) that nobody had yet called it a day. In one corner of the single-storey office building, in a room as inconspicuous as its occupant, sat G.K. Moopanar, the busy AICC(I) general secretary, his ring-studded finger periodically stabbing at the buttons of the intercom which connects him to his staff next door. They were all huddled in the committee room around a large oval table, sorting out circulars, leaflets, instruction books and mail. The year had just begun, and in two days' time Moopanar, the workhorse from Tamil Nadu, had been told to "goad into action" every party legislator in the farthest corners of the country. The rubber stamp that lay on his desk read, in firm capital letters, 'Top Priority'.

The hectic backroom activity, the strategy sessions, the public meetings, the clashes with non-Congress(I) state governments and finally, the mammoth party extravaganza in Calcutta recently, were all pointing in the same direction—elections. Though the date of the actual event still remains tantalisingly obscure, it was evident that the count-down had begun and the party was gearing to meet the coming challenge. In Calcutta, Mrs Gandhi's instructions on the concluding day rang out like parade ground commands. Five public meetings in 45 days in each of the country's 5,011 administrative blocks; rallies to be organised in each district and state capital; a meeting of the party's 3,000-odd MLA's and MLC's scheduled for New Delhi in February. The intention was clear. The party was getting into trim to fight elections.

So, it was time, after four years spent gathering roses, to head for the bustling bazars, the slumbering hamlets and the unending Indian countryside. It was time to organise meetings, to whip up public opinion, to choose election agents, and to rough it out, day and night, in jeeps, cars and small rooms in government bungalows in nowhere places. There was no dearth of phrases to be parroted: the nation was in danger of breaking into pieces; there were perils lurking just across the border; forces of regionalism were rearing their ugly heads everywhere; only Mrs Gandhi—needless to say—could keep the country united against machinations by sinister forces of unnamed origin.

Timely Lesson: It is only in the fourth week of December that 35 lakh voters, in three Lok Sabha and 11 assembly seats of north India, had given their verdict in a round of by-elections: returning one Congress MP and eight MLA's of the party but rubbing in the more important lesson that, but for the division in the anti-Congress votes, Mrs Gandhi's men would have been routed from many of the places from where they had won. There was frenetic activity in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), representing the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Lok Dal, Mrs Gandhi's arch enemies in the Hindi-speaking heartland of north India. At the fifth national convention of the BJP, which concluded at Indore last fortnight, a call was given to the party's 3 million-strong cadre to move out into the villages and launch a virtual election campaign.

Poll-eve excitement was heavy in the air. As the fortnight ended, 23 opposition parties, including the Janata Party, the Telugu Desam led by Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao, and the leftist flock shepherded by Jyoti Basu, chief minister of West Bengal, had ended their conclave, also in Calcutta, to reduce their internal differences. In Indore, Atal Behari Vajpayee, president of the BJP, was talking in terms of "meaningful dialogue" with the Janata Party, its rival in north India. The Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) organs were no longer spewing their familiar invective against the BJP. The election spirit was growing on the opposition parties in the Christmas season, when no one fritters away energy in internecine bickerings.



Congress(I) stalwarts ranged on the dais at the Calcutta party conclave, and (right) portraits for sale outside the session venue

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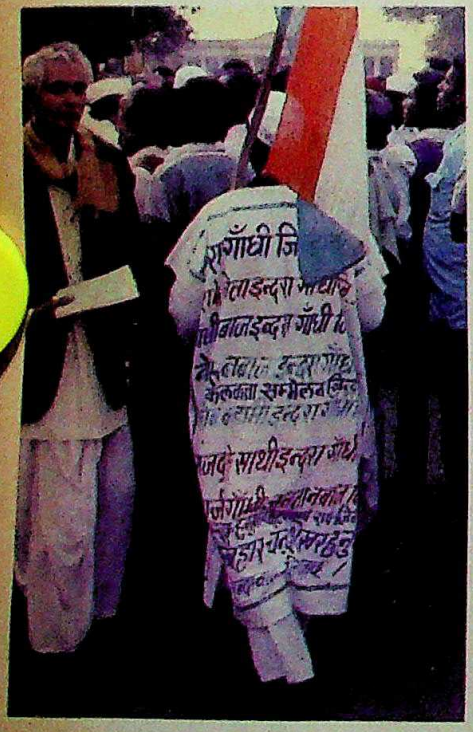
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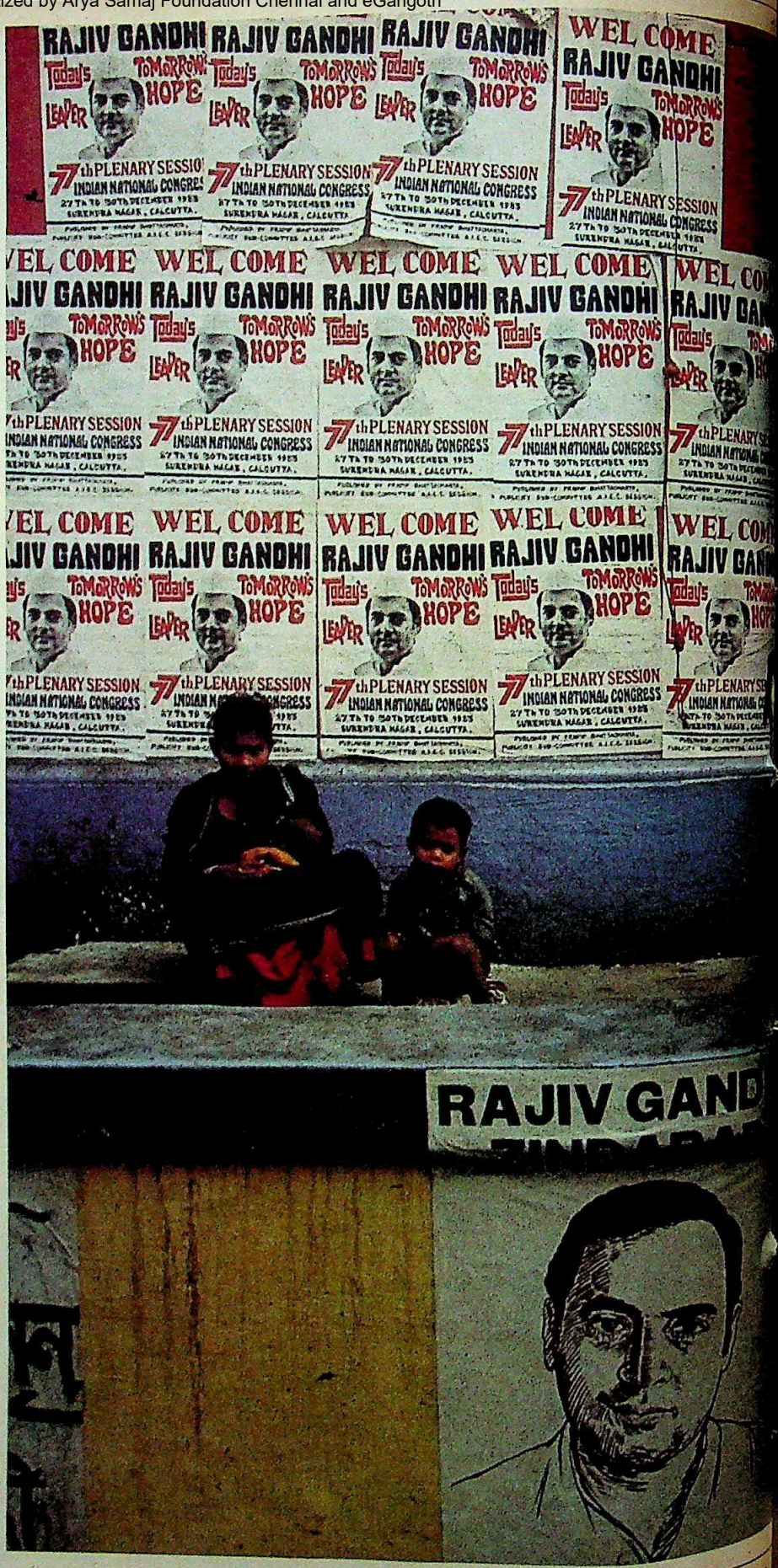
The Congress, on the other hand, was gearing up for the polls by whipping up a cloud of paranoia aimed at enemies, neatly labelled, lurking in every corner. In Mrs Gandhi's own words, spoken at the session, the party was up against "regional, communal, extremist, parochial, and near-secessionist agitations and organisations at home as well as the international forces of destabilisation which are receiving comfort from these domestic elements". Quite a mouthful, it seems, but these might as well have been her short-hand for: the Telugu Desam and the National Conference ("regional"); the BJP ("communal"); the Akali Dal and the All Assam Students' Union ("extremist"); the Lok Dal, the CPI(M) and the CPI ("parochial") and so on.

Sharp Attacks: She left no flank unguarded, aiming her broadsides evenly at every opposition target along as wide an arc as possible, and expecting the partymen to take the cue from these. The longest paragraph in her speech was of course devoted to the NDA, but the sharpest sentences were reserved for Farooq Abdullah, the Jammu & Kashmir chief minister, and his National Conference. Her intention was to create an undemocratic, Islamic-communal image for Farooq, so that by subjecting him to her flak, she could cut into the base of her most potent enemy, the BJP-Lok Dal combination in the Hindu segment of north India.

Significantly, apart from M.G. Ramachandran, the Tamil Nadu chief minister, and a potential election ally of the Congress,

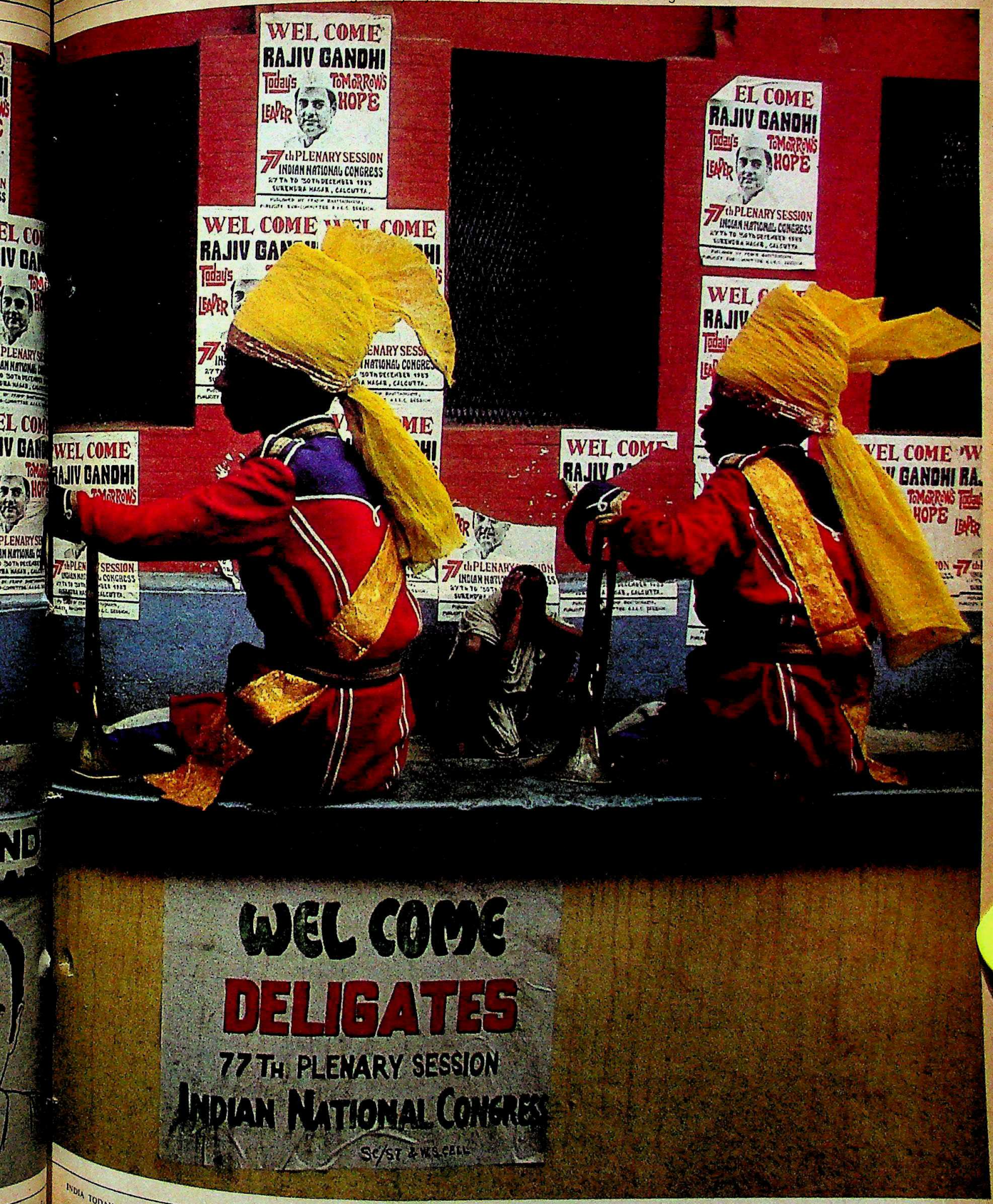
Welcome posters for Rajiv at Howrah station (right) and a committed supporter





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Rama Rao was the only non-Congress chief minister (other than the little-remembered Brigadier T. Sailo, chief minister of the Union Territory of Mizoram) who was spared the brunt of the party's attack. The magnanimity could have been born out of the consideration that Rama Rao may not turn out to be an adversary after the polls. However, the Left Front Government of West Bengal came in for harsh words from Rajiv. Mrs Gandhi also said that the leftists "make no secret of their determination to remove us from power", as if such a thing amounted to high treason.

For the Congress(I), the prospect of the election—which must under any circumstance be called this year—provided the background to the hectic efforts in first holding a plenary session and then embarking on a country-wide "mass contact" programme. Numbers were still on the side of the party. The first session of the AICC in Bombay in 1885 had attracted only 70 delegates: there were 15,000 delegates and "special invitees" in Calcutta this time round. Eight lakh people had surged into the city on the concluding day to listen to Mrs Gandhi at Brigade Parade Ground.

Shifting Fortunes: However, there was a basic difference from 1980. Then the party was lucky to unfurl its flags in a political hunting-ground where every negative vote against the crumbling successor government to the Janata ministry was converted to its advantage. The people's frustration with a paralysed rule coalesced into the tide that ultimately swept Mrs Gandhi back into power, even though her fledgling Congress(I) had not yet completed two years and did not even have offices at the district level. In fact she notched up a double victory in 1980 when she followed up her success at the Lok Sabha elections by winning assembly elections in nine states.

But there have been disconcerting changes since then. The decline became apparent in 1982, its benchmarks being:

► The verdict of the polls in the four states of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala and West Bengal. In Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, the Congress ended up with less than half the seats but managed to form governments through brazen defections. In Kerala, the Congress(I) formed the Government in an alliance: it won 20 seats in a house of 140. In West Bengal, the Congress(I) was routed for the second time since 1977, winning just 49 seats in the 294-member Assembly.

► The disastrous showing in the January 1983 polls when the Congress was smashed to smithereens in the southern states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka and the tiny north-eastern state of Tripura. The party had earlier held 429 of the 578 seats in the three states; its share plummeted to a humbling 152.

► The failure to wrest from the ruling National Conference the state of Jammu & Kashmir in May 1983, even after recording a sweeping victory in the Hindu-dominated Jammu region.

► In all these years, the only state where the Congress registered a victory was Assam where, after two years of Central rule a Congress Ministry took office after wading through a pool of blood (INDIA TODAY, February 28, 1983).

When charisma fails, organisation must step in. If it were a single woman's triumph over odds in 1980, the tables have clearly turned in four years. Now it is the party which has to rally behind her. The task is complicated by the fact that there are not many issues left which can be exploited with decisive effect. More significantly, there are not very many capable politicians left in the party who can boast of independent qualities of leadership. Rajiv recently spoke of a "poverty of leadership" as he felt when he joined politics in 1981. The "poverty" was much in

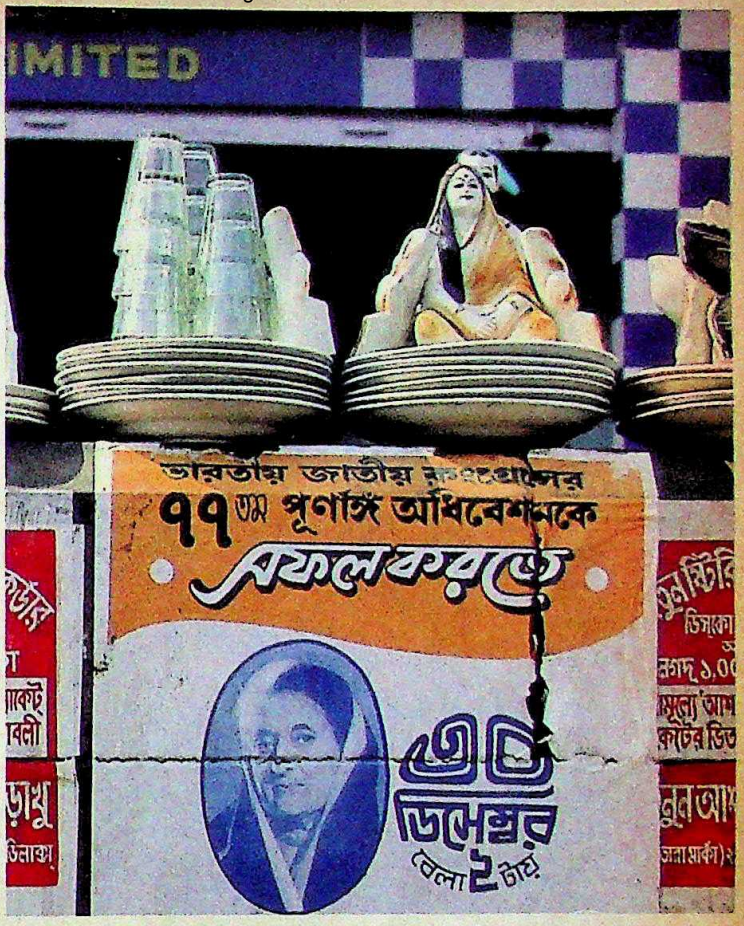
Outside the Calcutta party headquarters (below) and clockwise from top left: ex-chief minister Pahadia holds up a poster of his leader; a tea shop in the city; and the life-size cut-outs at the entrance to the venue



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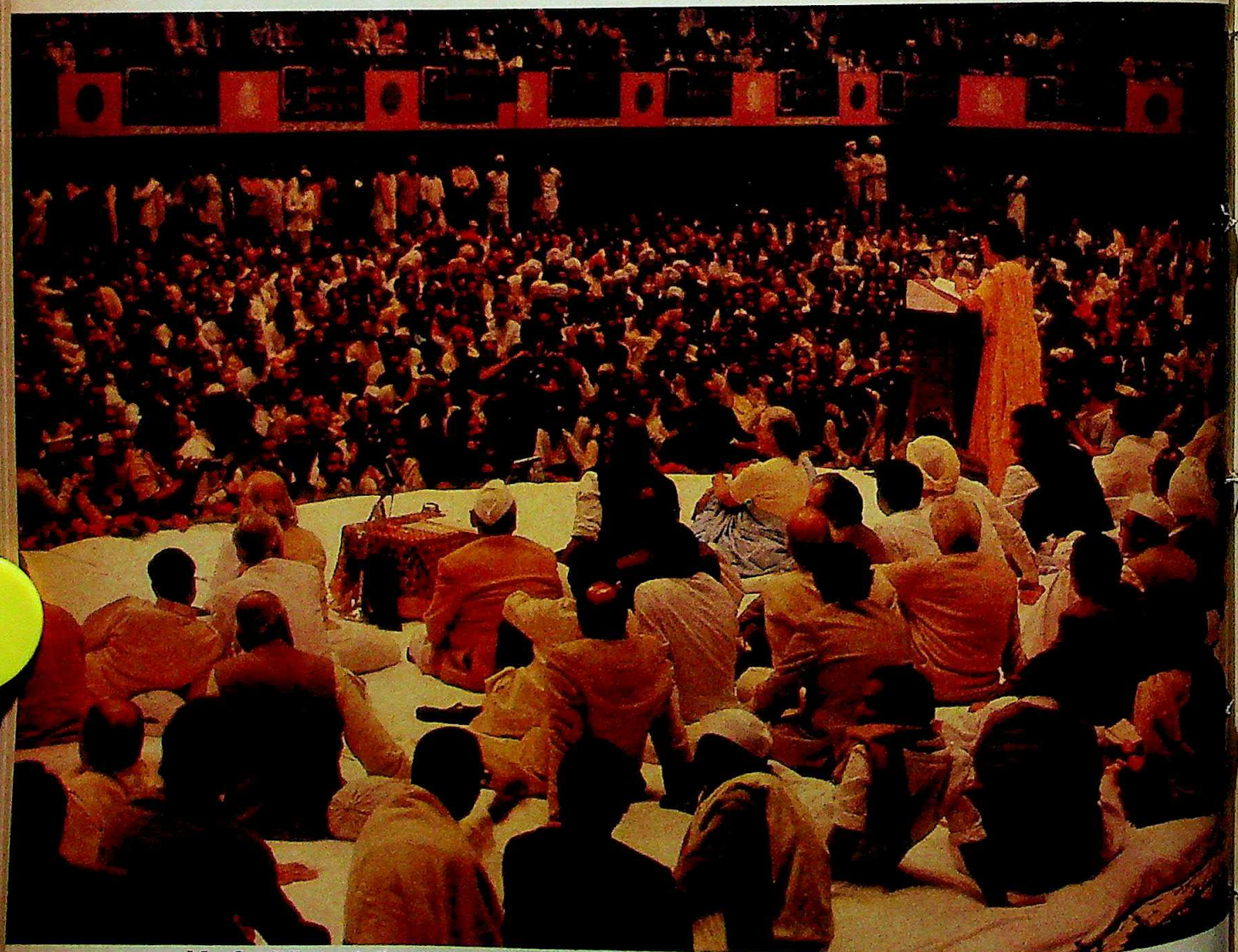
evidence in the Calcutta session itself.

Thus Union Railway Minister A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury, whose speeches in the Lok Sabha were often compared to a lumbering goods train by his detractors in the Opposition, was chosen as the mover of the main political resolution. The pearls of wisdom that he spewed out along the track included laudable clichés such as, "We will not rest content until, in the memorable words of Gandhiji, we have wiped a tear from every eye." It was indeed a procession of stuffed soldiers parading behind the microphone. Jagannath Pahadia, dismissed as Rajasthan chief minister in 1981 for his ineffectual stewardship of the state, delivered the keynote political speech at the subjects committee where he harped on the term 'neo-imperialism' to characterise all domestic and international opposition to Mrs Gandhi. "Mr Pahadia is in fact quoting from Lenin," wryly quipped an industrialist attending the session as a "distinguished visitor."

It is the same triteness that marked the two other resolutions on economy and international affairs. There was no soul-searching, no quest for deeper understanding, no attempt to get at the heart of problems. In fact, the acoustics of the stadium, designed to announce results of sporting events, was perfectly in step with the general obfuscation, reducing words to a lullaby drone throughout the proceedings. In the end, no ideological direction was given, no democratic consensus was distilled out of a maze of views, and no issue was hammered out. What is the message of the Calcutta plenary session? Replied B. Narayanamurthy, president of the Vishakhapatnam District Congress Committee(I) in Andhra Pradesh: "Madam wants us to defeat the Opposition everywhere this time."

With his rough-and-ready common sense, Narayanamurthy could see through the verbiage. Both Mrs Gandhi and Rajiv were busy throughout the session assessing the battleworthiness of the party, honing electoral strategy and getting into the crouch before leaping onwards. Mrs Gandhi spent most of the 40 hours of the session on stage. But Rajiv operated mostly from backstage, performing the Herculean feat of attending 68 closed-door meetings in course of four days.

He met all the 17 Congress chief ministers, the 22 PCC(I) chiefs, an equal number of Youth Congress(I) presidents, state chiefs of the National Students Union of India (NSUI) and the Seva Dal, his pampered party militia, and office-bearers of frontal organisations like the women's cell, the legal cell, the labour front and the minorities cell. Frequently away from the arc lamp of the podium, he sat in a room behind the stage set up for the working committee session—a large room with an unusually low Alice-in-Wonderland door. The floor was covered in white, and Rajiv sat in one corner by the side of a low Gandhian table. The Congressmen



Mrs Gandhi's concluding day address and (right) a Congress(I) worker on the road leading to the venue

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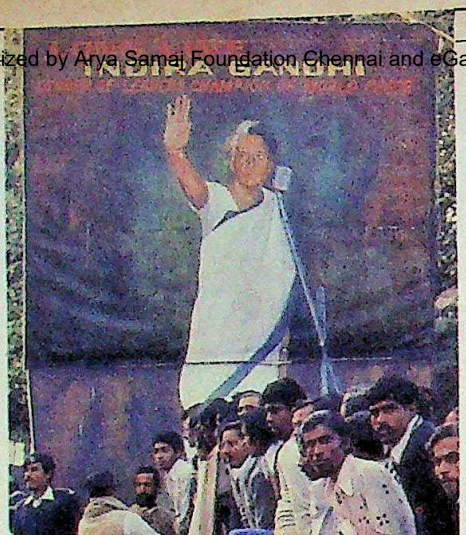
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streamed into the room like supplicants, piling chappals and shoes at the threshold as in a temple.

At these confabulations, the idea of a "mass contact" germinated. It was indeed designed as an election-eve stock-taking, to cost, by the AICC(I)'s own estimate, something like Rs 2.5 crore. In a trice, the razzle-dazzle of the session, the reams of resolutions and the hours before the microphone, had receded into the background. Some party MP's headed for their constituencies from Calcutta itself while others followed suit even before the new year hangover had lifted. Moopanar, who is in charge of the parliamentary board, promptly addressed a letter to each party MP and MLA, urging him to get going in the interests of "strengthening the party at the grassroot level". The corny phrase could not conceal the implicit note of urgency: after all, Congressmen do not lend themselves to be shuttled around without reason.

Pep Talks: The four-day session itself resounded with calls for closing ranks, exuding the kind of catholic spirit that would chime with the climate of election. Minutes before her concluding address, Mrs Gandhi sprang a surprise on the throng as she announced, extempore, the "plan of action" for the following six weeks. Looking stern and school-marmish in a grey polka-dotted sari that bared only half of her face, she told the delegates: "This is the time that we should forget our differences and make the party strong. If elections are held, we must fight it to win."



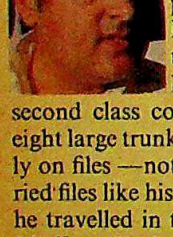
Curious crowds at Chowringhee

The pep and the hype were followed by frantic exhortations to work in the fields. Not willing to let grass grow under the feet of the MLA's, the MLC's and the Rajya Sabha members as well as the pradesh, district and block-level party chiefs, she fielded an army of one lakh Congressmen to win the hearts of the country's 32 crore voters in what looked like record time.

Suspending—not uncharacteristically—the difference between party and government, she told her ministers to "insist on the presence of Congress representatives at all public functions organised by the state governments, including the non-Congress states". The command drew its response in a few days' time when Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee invited Rajiv Gandhi, described as the 'hope of the nation' in the AICC(I) posters, to distribute to 40,000 people Rs 14 crore in bank loans at a ceremony at New Delhi's Ramlila Ground. The money came from the coffers of the nationalised banks which had not only financed the function but had taken out big front-page advertisements in the morning papers. On stage, five of Delhi's six Congress(I) MP's were present, making political capital out of

RAJIV GANDHI

Backstage



RAJIV Gandhi never travels light. When he left for Calcutta for the 77th plenary session of the All India Congress Committee, his private secretary had tucked into the second class coach of the special train eight large trunks, their lids pressed tightly on files —nothing but files. Rajiv carried files like his own shadow everywhere he travelled in the last two months—to Madhya Pradesh where he spent four days, to Rajasthan for three days, to Gujarat for another three days, to Madras for the AICC(I) regional conference, and to Nagpur for praying at the Paunar Ashram, where Vinoba Bhave died a year ago.

The files, written, charted, tabulated and compiled in a manner which is alien to the Congress style of long and verbose reporting, relate to development work in each corner of the country and the participation of the Congress workers in them. At Rajiv's personal secretariat in 2A, Motilal Nehru Marg, these development works are generally described by a crisp managerial term: input.

Reports on the 'inputs' pour into his secretariat almost every day from the various ministries, from party MP's, MLA's, even district Congress(I) offices in far-flung areas. The report of widening of a narrow-gauge railway line, for instance, is neatly docketed in the relevant constituency file. Six months later, the MP from the constituency is summoned to file a report on progress of work, and on popular reaction. The input, after all, should match the output.

Strenuous Preparations: The atmosphere is still different at the Youth Congress Development Centre on Raisina Road, a single-storey bungalow next to the Press Club of India and often referred to by Youth Congress zealots as "Rajiv's workshop". At the centre's conference room, a huge disc of eight feet diameter is hinged to a pinion fixed to the wall. The rotating disc has states and constituencies graded in arcs drawn along the circumference. At present there are 300-odd red dots marked on the 542 arcs, representing that many Lok Sabha constituencies. The dots are dearest to Rajiv, for they tell him where his youth coordinators are. Hand-picked by Rajiv, they are his private army, feeding inputs to constituencies.

Rajiv's speeches are well-researched —and drab. The Delhi-Calcutta special train by which he travelled stopped at 14 stations in between; Rajiv delivered the same speech at each of the stations, hammering the same theme of rising threat to the country's unity, and parroting the claim that only the Congress can safeguard it. However, his voice is no longer as deadpan as it used to be two years ago. He modulates it for effect, and even peppers his speech with a couple of pithy remarks that are palpably pre-rehearsed.

There are marks of strenuous coaching all over. The cool voice from the pilot's cabin is now trained to rise and fall like a demagogue's. The Hindustani, chaste but uncolloquial, sounds newly learnt. There are tell-tale signs of Mrs Gandhi's tutoring.

Shivkumar Mishra, a 75-year-old AICC(I) delegate from Shahjahanpore in Uttar Pradesh who has not failed to attend a single Congress session since the Lahore session in 1929, reminisced: "Now Mrs Gandhi is seen on the platform most of the time while Rajiv works backstage. I remember in the past Congress sessions, Pandit Nehru used to be onstage all the time but Mrs Gandhi would move around meeting the delegates." Rajiv is a diligent learner. He is also a work-horse, often addressing 20 public meetings in a day, or conferring with as many groups of people in his office. He does not lack application or will. What he really lacks is originality.

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an essentially administrative function.

The party obviously needed a large helping hand from the Government to make up for its inner emptiness. At no time in the past did the party seem so bereft of human resources at various levels of leadership. The selection of personnel has mainly been Rajiv's handiwork. Said Rajendra Kumari Bajpai, one of the AICC(I) general secretaries: "It is an undeniable fact that Rajivji has played a significant role in selection of people at responsible positions in his own way." However, the selection process in the last three years by the high command, in which Rajiv is believed to have played a decisive role, seemed to have been bedevilled with a singular lack of political horse sense.

Political Lightweights: For instance, Chandra Shekhar Singh in Bihar, (Rajiv's choice as chief minister), was embroiled in controversy from the day he took over. His reputation of being a man of integrity was largely useless because while forming his Cabinet he had to induct as many as eight members of the earlier Jagannath Mishra cabinet, whose alleged acts of commission and omission supposedly provoked the change. Six months after his ouster, Mishra still retains enough influence among the legislators—as he demonstrated in Calcutta —to shepherd them to Rajiv's durbar in strength and to demand Singh's removal. Even Rajiv's admirers today agree that he played his cards clumsily in Bihar and endeared himself to none.

In Uttar Pradesh, whose MP's form the most extensive block in the Lok Sabha, Rajiv's choice of chief minister was a disaster from the word go. Sripat Misra, who got the chair 18 months ago with no visible asset other than the fortuitous favour showered on him by Rajiv, is besieged with dissension within his party and charges of incompetence hurled at him. In the last round of by-elections (INDIA TODAY, January 15), the Congress(I) in Uttar Pradesh had to concede three out of five assembly seats and the lone Lok Sabha seat of Bulandshahr. One of the assembly seats was snatched away by Maneka Gandhi's Rashtriya Sanjay Manch (RSM), the particularly irritating thorn in the flesh of the Gandhi family.

The selection of chief ministers after Rajiv had taken over as the de facto number two person in the party was marked by amateurism. The procession of chief ministers in Andhra Pradesh after Anjiah's ouster boomeranged. In Maharashtra, Babasaheb Bhosale came and went as a comic interlude. However, the high command's choice of the PCC(I) presidents was equally grotesque. Example:

► Sukhdev Prasad, the 63-year-old Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee(I) president, and father of 11, was mechanically elevated to the post because he was a Harijan. Prasad is a Sahitya Ratna and is steeped in Sanskrit poetry. But, when asked to comment on the immediate task before Congressmen in his state he replied lackadaisically: "The main task is to implement the policies of Indiraji and Rajivji." Prasad has never contested a parliamentary election, has never been an office-bearer of the PCC(I) and has never led the district committee even in his native Gorakhpur.

► Ananda Gopal Mukherjee, the West Bengal PCC(I) president, has the reputation of being a poet of sorts. Though a trade union leader of long standing, Mukherjee has so far played the innocent bystander while Congress factions in his state, owing allegiance to Pranab Mukherjee and Ghani Khan Chowdhury, the two Central ministers from West Bengal, have fought it out in the streets.

► Ramprasad Singh, the Bihar PCC(I) president, filled the bill because he is a member of the backward community and therefore could "balance" the appointment of Chandra Shekhar Singh, a Rajput, as chief minister. Singh, like his peer Prasad in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh, never held any office in the pradesh or district unit and even lost the assembly election in 1980.



(Clockwise from top left) Chandra Shekhar Singh, Sripat Misra, N.M. Kamble and Ram Gopal Tiwari: ineffective leadership

► Ram Gopal Tiwari, the Madhya Pradesh PCC(I) president, at 74, is too infirm to shoulder the responsibility of leading his party to victory. As a former chairman of the National Agricultural Federation (NAFED), he was haunted by charges of financial wheeling-dealing. Tiwari, like other Rajiv appointees, is an apprentice in Congress management, never having occupied any post in the PCC(I) or the party committee in his district.

► N.M. Kamble, the Maharashtra PCC(I) president, and a Harijan, was again chosen to set off the selection of Vasantdada Patil, a strong Maratha leader, as the chief minister. Kamble again has no experience in running district offices and is regarded in the party as a rootless politician imposed from above.

Such haphazard selection signals a gradual undermining of the PCC(I)'s to an unprecedented extent. Even in the 1978-80 period, when the party was virtually non-existent lower down, Mrs Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi had taken care in choosing the PCC(I) presidents, picking up loyal persons with some following in their states. But now the new crop of presidents is overshadowed by decided heavyweights: a Tiwari in Madhya Pradesh is dwarfed by Vidya Charan Shukla, by any reckoning the craftiest politician of the state; a Prasad in Uttar Pradesh is hardly a match for Mohsina Kidwai, former PCC(I) president, K.C. Pant, son of Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant and a former working committee member, or N.D. Tiwari, former state chief minister.

The high command had better options in almost every state. In Maharashtra, it had a large range of people to opt from: Vasant Sathe, the popular leader from the Vidarbha region; Jambuvantrao Dhote, the fiery MP from Nagpur city; and Yashwantrao Mohite, respected Congressman and a sugar lobby leader of long standing. In Bihar, Abdul Ghafoor, former chief minister, was much in the reckoning as was Baliram Bhagat, former Lok Sabha speaker and prominent partyman. Both were ignored.

Nominated Office-bearers: The stature of the pradesh committee president was shortened just as his power to select the executives was abridged. Even though the Congress began functioning as a party of nominated—not elected—office-bearers as early as 1972, the PCC presidents at least retained the authority of choosing their own executives as well as the leaders at the district committee level. This convention was drastically reversed in the post-1980 phase. The executives down to the district level are now appointed directly by the AICC(I). As its most prominent general secretary, Rajiv is often called upon to arbitrate the selection of even bloc-level presidents.

Raghunandan Lal Bhatia, president of the Punjab PCC(I), defends the pyramidal structure and the nomination system saying: "The high command takes the majority view into consideration and goes by consensus." The reality is quite different though. When Bhatia was himself nominated as president, not even Darbara Singh, the then chief minister of Punjab, was consulted. In Maharashtra, Vasantdada Patil's unhappiness over the selection of S.M.I. Aseer as PCC(I), president became a public issue.

Imposed from the top, the pradesh committee executives today are alienated from

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the masses. As a general secretary of the AICC(I) admitted, of the 500-odd office-bearers of the country's 24 PCC(I)'s nearly three-fourths have virtually no experience of popularising Congress(I) programmes in the districts. The Calcutta session itself witnessed the new stratification in the Congress(I) in which the smart set, running the PCC(I)'s in isolation from the districts, got prompt audiences with AICC(I) leaders while the district committee-wallas, put up in squalid accommodation at the mosquito-infested Salt Lake complex, roamed about aimlessly in the city's parks, zoo and museum.

Young Brigades: During Sanjay's stewardship, the party was virtually run by a bunch of local subedars: Gundu Rao for Karnataka, A.R. Antulay for Maharashtra, Ghani Khan Chowdhury for West Bengal, Jagannath Mishra for Bihar. After Sanjay's death, they felt uneasy. Many of them came under a cloud, even being dragged to court. They also discovered to their discomfiture that there was no stout defence from the high command: at least the support was insignificant in comparison to the zealous defence Mrs Gandhi and her family members had themselves received from the party during the Janata period when equally grave charges were levelled at them before the various commissions of inquiry.

THE SANJAYITES made a quick departure from the political scene. Antulay and Mishra were removed. Rao lost an election. There was a feeling that the exit of controversial chief ministers was caused by Rajiv, regarded as "Mr Clean" and discovered to be capable of wielding the broomstick too. But the feeling of moral superiority at the seeming purge of these black sheep turned out to be illusory. The high command's trial with a new horde of nonentities could not prevent the organisation sliding back in all states, exemplified by the two defeats in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The tarnished but trusted men had to be recalled.

The Calcutta session itself witnessed the return of some of them into the glare of the arc lamp. Rao was back in circulation not only at the front row of the stage as a special invitee of the working committee but also as a VIP guest, put up at the exclusive Oberoi Grand—whereas Central ministers lived at the cheaper Great Eastern Hotel. Rao was also assigned recently to negotiate with Chenna Reddy, the influential but refractory former chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, who had recently threatened to float a new regional party.

Antulay, still besieged with court cases that threaten to ruin his political career, was invited to speak on the party's economic resolution. Jagannath Mishra operated mostly from behind the scenes, mobilising nearly 80 Bihar MLA's who are still beholden to him to meet Rajiv and stridently lobby against Chandra Shekhar Singh and the PCC(I) leadership. Mishra's official exoneration seemed complete when the report of the AICC(I) general secretaries, with Rajiv as a co-signatory, enthused: "With the cooperation and patronage of Shri Jagannath Mishra, the then chief minister, most of the things mentioned in the manifesto of the party in the General Election of 1980 have been put into practice."

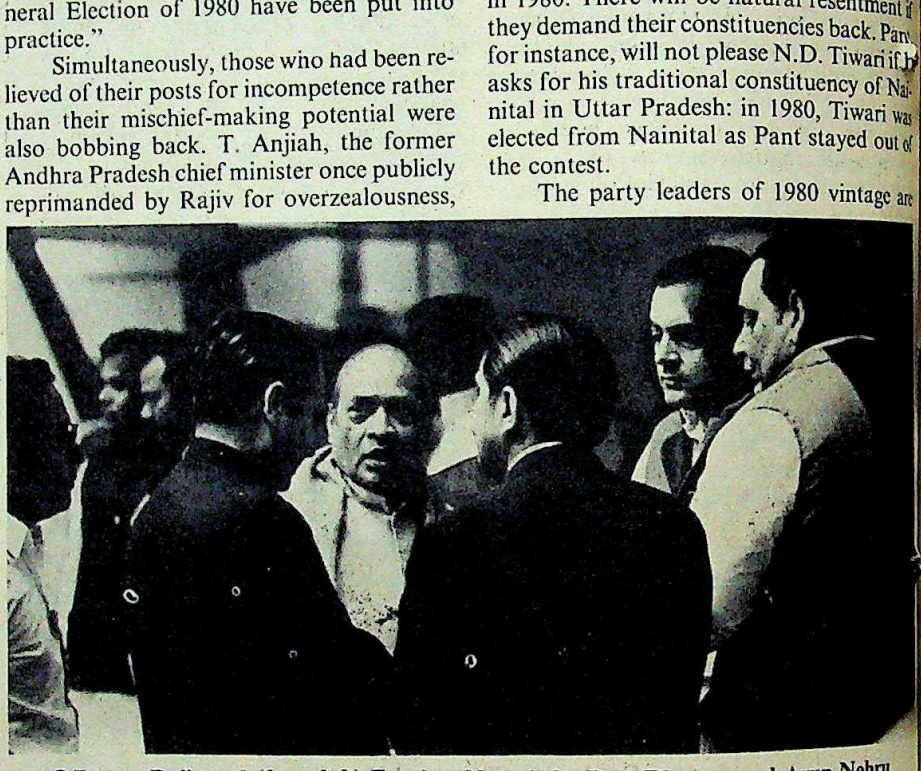
Simultaneously, those who had been relieved of their posts for incompetence rather than their mischief-making potential were also bobbing back. T. Anjiah, the former Andhra Pradesh chief minister once publicly reprimanded by Rajiv for overzealousness, was one of the main speakers on the political resolution. Brahmananda Reddy, who expelled Mrs Gandhi from the party in 1978, waxed eloquent at the Calcutta session. Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi, who had described Mrs Gandhi as "authoritarian" as late as 1980, moved the resolution on international affairs. Debi Prasad Chattopadhyay, who had deposed against Mrs Gandhi before the Shah Commission, moved the economic resolution. Of the seven working committee members who had not sided with Mrs Gandhi at the time of the 1978 split—Reddy, Hitendra Desai, Siddharth Shankar Ray, Y.B. Chavan, Vayalar Ravi, Dasmunshi and K.C. Pant— all but Ray were back in the party.

Criticisms: Dashrath Dubey, the bearded secretary of the Rohtas district committee in Bihar, not yet trained in the art of concealing views, remarked: "The party leaders should guard against the Congress being used like a railway platform where people can board a train or alight from one as they wish." Peter Alphonse, the young PCC(I) president of Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu, observed: "Ideally, the late comers should start from scratch and prove themselves afresh in the Congress."

The party had obviously opened its doors to drop-outs, late comers and embittered deserters of the past to broaden its base at a critical time. But it is likely to create more problems than it will solve. Many of the new comers are popular in their own right but were swept away by the Indira tide in 1980. There will be natural resentment if they demand their constituencies back. Parv for instance, will not please N.D. Tiwari if h asks for his traditional constituency of Nainital in Uttar Pradesh: in 1980, Tiwari was elected from Nainital as Pant stayed out of the contest.

The party leaders of 1980 vintage are now bold enough not to conceal their resentment. Said Mishra without mincing words: "There are some people who come to Mrs Gandhi only when she is in power...such people cannot be of any use to the party. If the Congress now ignores the loyal and dedicated people, it may recoil on the party at the time of the elections." Even Anjiah solemnly prophesied: "The grassroots-level workers will support and respect only those Congressmen who never left the party led by Mrs Gandhi."

The Congress(I) was indeed up against its arch-enemy: dissidence within. There was not a single state unit where feuding factions were not prepared to fight it out in the streets. It resembled the pairing of heroes in the best Hollywood tradition: V.C. Shukla vs Chief Minister Arjun Singh in Madhya Pradesh; Mishra vs Chandra Shekhar Singh in Bihar; Antulay vs Vasantdada Patil in Maharashtra; former PCC(I) chief Dharmvee vs Sripat Mishra in Uttar Pradesh; Chief Mi nister J.B. Patnaik vs former Youth Con



Offstage: Rajiv and (from left) Fotedar, Narasimha Rao, Dhawan and Arun Nehru

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gress(I) chief Ramachandra Rath in Orissa; Ghani Khan Chowdhury vs Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee in West Bengal; Moopanar vs matinee idol Sivaji Ganesan in Tamil Nadu; Finance Minister Sanat Mehta vs Chief Minister Madhavsinh Solanki in Gujarat; Bansi Lal vs Bhajan Lal in Haryana; Karnataka Legislature Party Chief Veerappa Moily vs Gundu Rao; Kerala Chief Minister K. Karunakaran vs former chief minister A.K. Anthony; and Assam Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia vs former chief minister Anwara Taimur. In many states, the embattled Congressman took this blood-feud more seriously than his war with the Opposition.

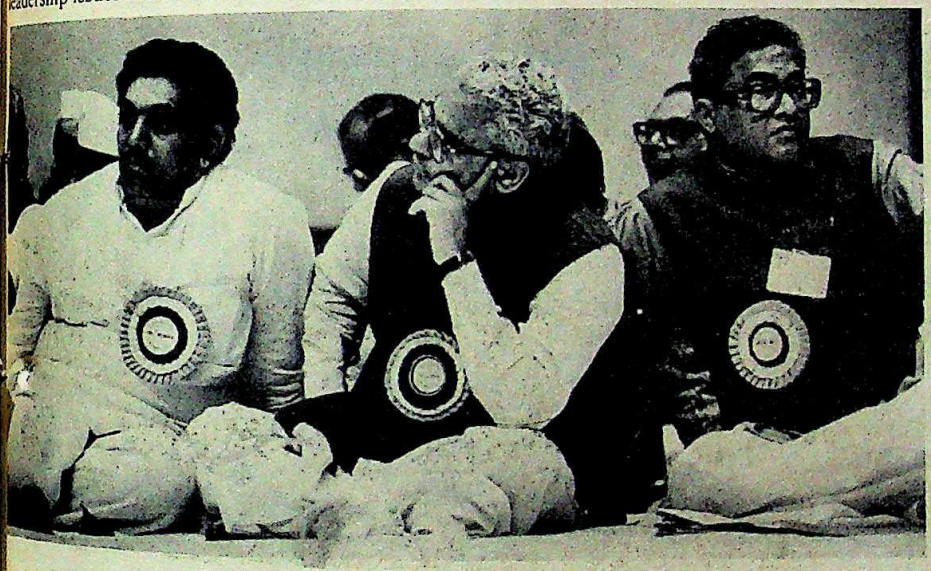
The party will continue to get bogged down in such controversies as long as leadership issues are not decided democratically through party elections. Internal democracy enabled the party to stay in constant touch with a large variety of opinions, groups and communities within the country. That tradition has decayed.

An example of this was the hectic backstage lobbying that went on in Calcutta to fill a vacancy in the CWC(I) created by the recent resignation of Syed Mir Qasim from the party. Khan Chowdhury, Rafiq Zakaria, Antulay, Abdul Ghafoor—virtually every known Muslim leader was thought of and rejected. The vacancy at the top perch of the party could not be filled because the high command was never quite sure as to who would be able to voice the aspirations of the community. A Muslim MP from Maharashtra said: "I am afraid the Congress is gradually losing touch with the Muslim opinion and there is no single Muslim Congressman today who can renew the link."

The same is true of the backward classes, constituting about [illegible] per cent of the population of India. They are a collection of nearly 100 castes in each state, but 25 to 30 of them are vocal and have undeniable electoral importance. In Bihar, for instance, the Janata government under Karpoori Thakur displayed a new stridency in their demands: Thakur belongs to a backward class himself. He is now an influential leader of the Janata Party in Bihar, but the Congress(I) is yet to find a match for him from among its own ranks. The report of the AICC(I) general secretaries, including Rajiv, admitted the party's tenuous contact with the backward classes when it said: "It is ncecessary that direct contact at the Central level with the leaders of the individual castes and communities (of the backward classes) has to be established."

Lukewarm Zeal: Even the linguistic groups are not adequately represented at the CWC(I). Pranab Mukherjee, the only Bengali at that level, is a pale ghost of the Bengali stalwarts who dominated the past working committees—Atulya Ghosh and Siddharth Shankar Ray being the more recent examples. Mukherjee has never got elected either to the state Assembly or to the Lok Sabha from West Bengal. The party is also cut off from the ethnic roots: no prominent Santhal, Munda or Oraon leader was seen at the Calcutta session. Nor, in spite of its professed concern for the poorest in the country, was there a discernible representation of landless labourers, unemployed youth, workers from the unorganised sector—no recognisable presence of the larger cross-section of society. The present monolith is clearly out of character with the party whose very name, as Rajiv himself cynically paraphrased in his recent interview with the Bengali daily *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, indicates "an assembly of multiple ideas".

In the same interview, Rajiv pleaded that party elections could not be held because "most state Congress offices have not maintained proper membership rolls". He referred to Maharashtra "where no membership roll exists". He also pleaded helplessness as he claimed that the papers "were lost" at the time of the "split" (the 1978 one). But this logic was clearly specious. Five years have given the party enough time to put together a new membership roll and to press ahead for elections. It is only in Orissa that the party has attempted to hold elections. The attempt was bedevilled with raucous complaints of "rigging" even within the party forum, and matters went as far as the courts. The anti-chief minister group in Orissa finally boycotted the elections. The fiasco persuaded the high command not to hold elections elsewhere.



Onstage: Gundu Rao Bhajan Lal and Mishra

Crucial Battle: Myopic, hermetically closed, arbitrarily structured—yet this is the party which Mrs Gandhi has to lead to victory in a few months from now. In 1980, she blitzed her way to victory winning 351 of the 542 seats. But her southern bastion, where she won 109 out of 129 seats, is shaky now. If assembly elections are any indicator, the popular mood is now favouring regional leadership more than a strong unitary control.

Maybe Mrs Gandhi can still reverse the trend with a whole array of factors that favour her: the resources of the Government; the fact that 17 of the country's 24 chief ministers belong to her party; the fact of her birth and the cumulative effect of her having been the prime minister for 15 years. She is still the only Indian leader to have reached the dizzy pinnacle of popularity which no single politician can hope to attain in a life-time. She is a leader extraordinary, alone at her top perch, and quite unassailable by an opposition divided as drastically as the Congress(I), if not more, within its own ranks.

The plea by her that the country is threatening to break into pieces will naturally have more takers than the opposition parties would like to concede. The slogan of "desh bachao!" now at the drawing-board stage in the AICC(I) works, will also have a guaranteed audience despite opposition claims to the contrary. Mrs Gandhi is of course a known entity, and the electorate has seen her in the best and the worst of her times. It deserted her in anger after she had brought in the Emergency. It showered forgiveness on her three years later after the collapse of the Janata. The Opposition is a motley crowd. This remains her greatest advantage since 1980; but the political map of India has been relentlessly re-drawn since then, mostly to her discomfiture. The next election is no cake-walk for her; it will require her to employ all her resources, including her fabled charisma and the might of her party, to reach the winning post.

—SUMIT MITRA and PRABHU CHAWLA
with SUMANTA SEN

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PIPARIA

Vicious Vendetta

THE WAILS hang in the air like a mist of sound, rising and falling in a mournful melody that not even the chill of January can dampen. They float out from the small cluster of mud huts that huddle together close to the Ganga, the weeping women passing the sound and the sorrow from hut to hut in an eerie relay. It is as if tears are all that are left for the impoverished village of 1,000, at the end of a dirt track on the edge of nowhere.

Last fortnight, tears did appear to be all that were left for Piparia village in Monghyr district of Bihar, 100 km from Patna. On January 4, a group of men kidnapped 9 children, one young man and a 60-year-old man from Piparia, who had all crossed the river to gather fodder or to carry food to others working in the fields. A few days later, three children returned, and in their eyes could be clearly read the stark horror of a killing in cold blood: the others, the survivors recounted tremblingly, had been murdered or beaten senseless by their captors and piled onto a boat, which was the last they saw of them. They themselves were shut up in a room for three days and released with a harsh warning to keep their mouths shut.

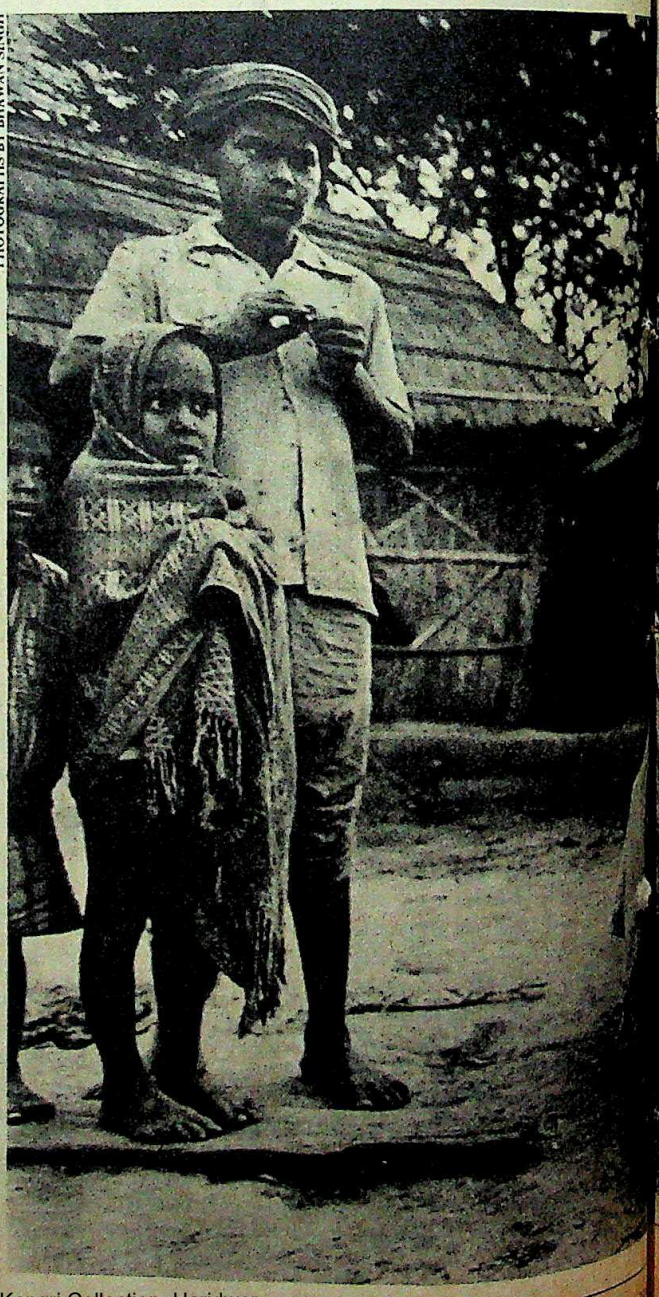
A week later, Kailu Yadav, Jadu Yadav and Krishna Yadav, the three survivors, were still shivering with fear, uncontrollable spasms wracking their undernourished bodies. The villagers, knowing with dreadful certainty that the missing were dead, had made straw effigies—*kharmukhas*—of them and 'cremated' these on the bank of the Ganga. Although no trace of the bodies has been found, the police privately agree with Piparia residents. Said a senior police officer: "Ninety-nine per cent, the kids have been killed and flung into the river." The toll: Ganesh Yadav, 12; Vijay Yadav, 17; Punit Yadav, 15; Masudan Yadav, 15; Hareram Yadav, 8; Upendra Yadav, 9; Bhola Yadav, 14; Jagdish Yadav, 14; Bhagwan Rai, 14; Kirtan Yadav, 24; and Lila Yadav, 60.

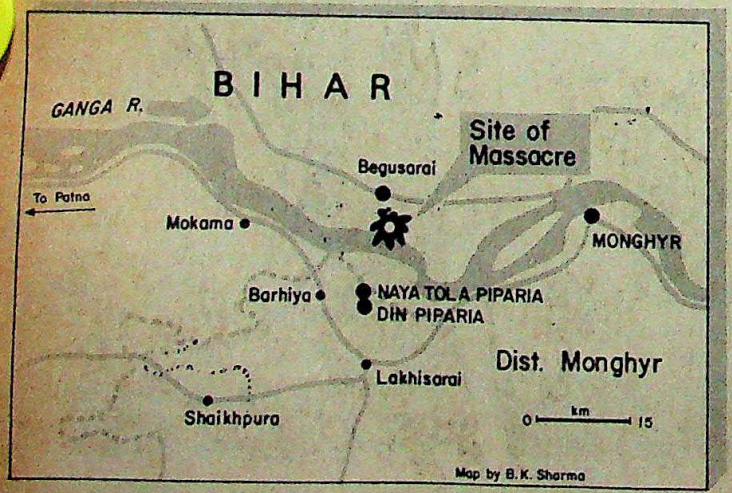
Caste Feud: The fact that all but one of the list belong to the Yadav caste is no coincidence: it sums up the entire blood-stained episode as one more act in an old and weary tragedy. The dead are said to have been the victims of a long-drawn-out inter-caste war between the Yadav and Dhanuk castes in the village—actually two settlements, Naya Tola Piparia and Dih Piparia—a war that had its roots in the struggle for land, less and less of which is available as the river eats into it every year. In August 1983 four Dhanuks were killed. Then followed the murder of Rameshwar Yadav, a former freedom fighter. The families of all the victims of this carnage had deposed as witnesses in the Rameshwar Yadav murder case. Bhagwan



(Below) The mourning women in Piparia

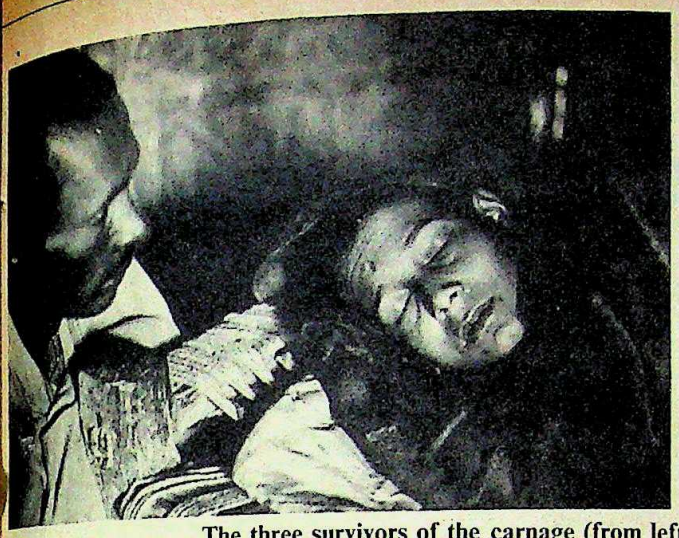
PHOTOGRAPHS BY BHAWAN SINGH





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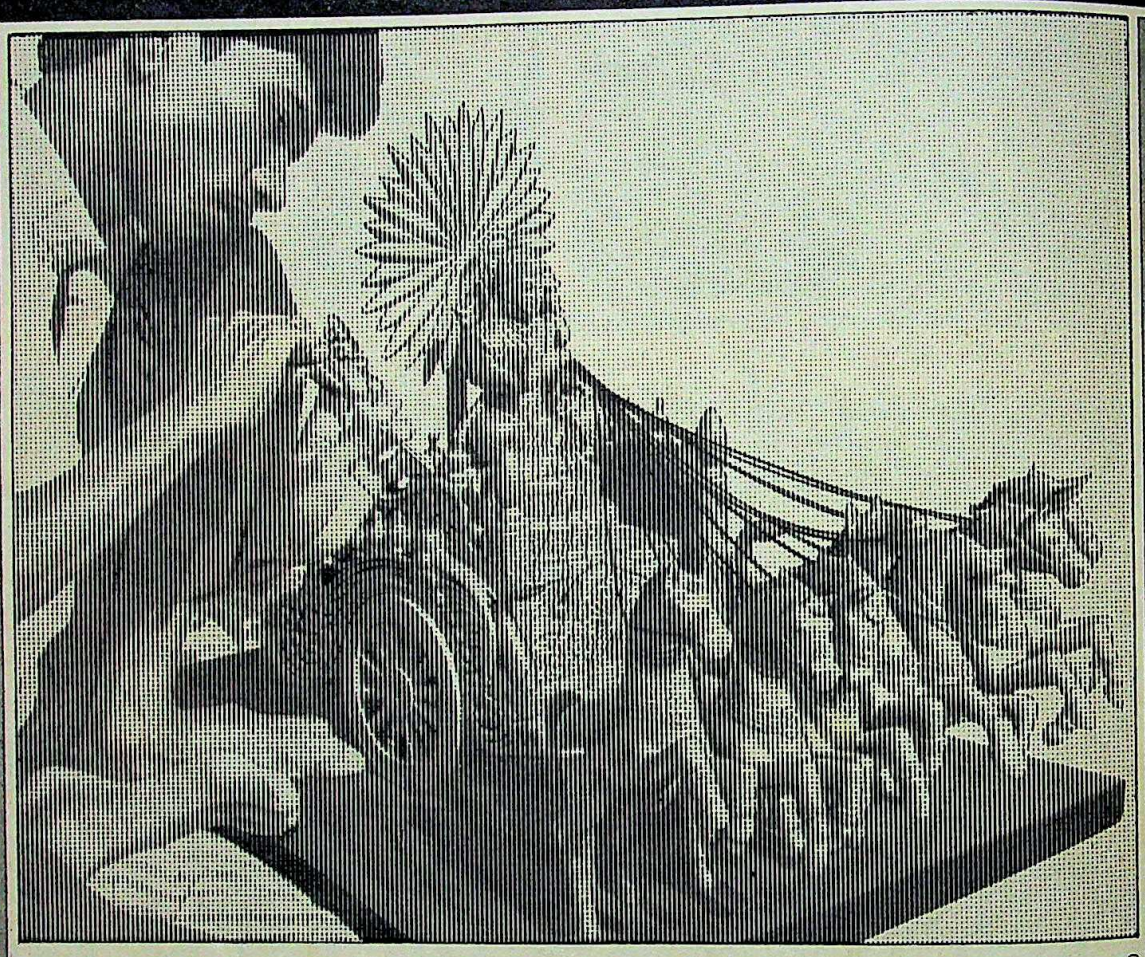
The three survivors of the carnage (from left) Krishna, Jadu and Kailu: ghastly experience



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Rai, the only Dhanuk in the list, was the son of Balram Rai who turned 'traitor' to his caste by appearing as a witness in the same case.

It was a stunned Balram who filed the first information report (FIR) after the latest act of the vendetta. And it was Balram who was a helpless eyewitness to the kidnapping, watching from hiding as a large group of men pounced upon the children. For two days Balram had been staying with his cousin Sono Yadav, who lives on the opposite bank; Bhagwan had probably been sent across the river with food for his father. Says Sono Yadav: "Soon after the boat arrived we heard the sound of firing. Knowing what goes on in the area we hid ourselves. We saw about 40 to 50 people pounce upon the children. Bhagwan was first hit on his shoulders and then on the face. Beating and hitting the children, the men tied their hands and dragged them away. Out of fear we kept hiding. There was no boat left when we came out. It was only the next morning that we got a ride on a fisherman's boat and reported the matter to the police."

Meanwhile, the kidnapped were going through hell. The memory is so terrifying that the description of what happened has to be coaxed bit by bit out of Kailu, Jadu and Krishna. As they tell it, when the boatload of villagers ferried across the river disembarked, a horde of men surrounded them. The Yadavs among the lot were asked to stand aside. Their hands were tied and they were beaten and marched westwards like cattle. After some time, when dusk was giving way to night, their captors called a halt and started beating them mercilessly. Says Kailu: "Three of us wrapped ourselves around the legs of an old man and began screaming for mercy. He saved us. The others were beaten until they were either dead or half dead and then loaded onto a fisherman's dinghy. While most of the gang sat in the dinghy accompanying the bodies, two or three of them remained behind with us."

Grim Ordeal: The shivering boys were marched some distance. Then the group stopped and the escorts cooked fish for their dinner. Later, the boys were roughly hustled on to a waiting boat. They crossed the river to the other side, whereupon the children were blindfolded and made to stumble a few more miles. "We were shut up in a room," recalls Kailu. "One man stood guard over us. On the third day we were released, told not to look back and not to utter a word to anybody."

Jadu, the nightmarish days fresh in his mind, says they thought that initially five of them, who were screaming and crying for mercy, might be spared. But ultimately two were taken away, presumably to have their throats slit with scythes. Significantly, there were many Yadavs in the original group that was surrounded on the river bank, but only those from Piparia were captured. Says Jadu: "At night when they cooked food and I would not eat, first they ordered me to eat and when I began eating, they shouted, 'Is it out of your father's earnings that you are eating?' " His cousin Krishna adds that they were armed with guns and that among them he saw a man known in the area as 'Kajla'—so called because of his dark complexion and the dark patches around his eyes.

Kajla is one of the 44 men named in Balram Rai's FIR. He has been on the wanted list for two years now, but has never been arrested. Other prominent men the police are searching for are Rajan Chain and Ramjattan Rai. Six persons have been arrested—Waki, Hamji, Firo, Kelu, Waji and Ram Balk—and another six have surrendered. As DIG (Bhagalpur range) Upendra Prasad says: "You cannot say we have made no breakthrough."

The task of the police is made vastly more difficult by the fact that they have not been able to recover any trace of the killers from the killing ground. There are no bloodstains or other clues in the marshy land ringed by neck-high mustard crop and thick grass where the children were taken for their last walk. The only sign that somebody had been there recently were a few sticks of turmeric and a blackened patch of earth near a hut where the killers are said to have cooked their dinner.

The tragedy is compounded by the stark fact that if the police had



Police combing the area where the massacre is said to have taken place: meagre clues

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The suspects in police custody: caste feud

responded quicker to the appeals for help, the children might have been saved. The villagers claim that as the horrible news trickled in from across the river, they went to both the Naya Tola and the main Piparia outposts. At Naya Tola, they say, they were told to put their complaint down in writing. At Piparia outpost, according to the villagers, they were told that the daroga was away on duty and the constable present could not leave until the daroga returned.

In any case, it seems that subordinates are reluctant to take charge in any major incident, in case a firing has to be ordered. Thus it was not until the next morning, when Constable Hare Krishan Mishra walked the 24 km from Piparia to Bahariya town—there is no wireless communication between the two, nor is there a serviceable road—that the case could be registered. By then, of course, it was too late to save any body. The Government has now suspended the officer-in-charge and an assistant sub-inspector of Piparia on charges of negligence.

The authorities are now inquiring into the causes of the delay. Says Upendra Prasad: "Though on our last visit we could not identify any villager who said he had made a report at Naya Tola, in Piparia's case one man has been identified who says he went to the outpost on January 4 itself. The policemen on duty at the outpost have denied this."

Slow Response: The politicians, inevitably, fastened on the carnage, though not immediately. Congress(I) MP D.P.Yadav was the first to tell the story three days after the episode, saying that 17 had died. The villagers maintain that he has still to visit Piparia. It was a whole week before Chief Minister Chandra Shekhar Singh announced his decision to visit the village. He was beaten to it by opposition leaders such as Karpoori Thakur, Ram Dev Yadav, Bhola Yadav as well as some Sarvodaya workers. The Congress(I) MLA from the area, Ashwani Kumar, had also come calling, giving away the all too token relief of 5 kg of grain and a sari for each household.

Chief Minister Singh denies that his administration reacted late; he admitted, however, that Upendra Prasad could visit the place only four days after the incident and that other senior officials arrived there a week later on January 11. He asserts, nevertheless, that the local police and administration were active right from the beginning.

Last fortnight's killings are unlikely to be the end of the vende as the Yadavs are in all probability thirsting for revenge. Piparia a the *tolas* (settlements) around it are divided into two camps, with Dhanuks, the Bhinds and the Bhumihars on one side and the Yad on the other. In 1982 the Dhanuks led by Rajan Chain and Yadavs by Adhik Yadav were involved in a no-holds-barred encou ter. When a police posse arrived Chain's group escaped while Yadavs got the better of the police, capturing one sub-inspector four constables. The constables simply vanished; the sub-inspecto body was found in Monghyr on the river bank, the stomach slash open—the body was lying, ironically, outside the bungalow of Monghyr superintendent of police. Adhik Yadav is still at large.

Continuing Vendetta: Shortly after this gory episode, the nin year-old son of Rameshwar Yadav was kidnapped and killed. O August 19, 1983, four Dhanuks were killed and their bodies dispos of. Precisely 10 days later Rameshwar Yadav was himself murder and his killers have not been found to this day.

The publicity that the Piparia slaughter has received has result in an unprecedented burst of attention from the powers that b Senior police officials have virtually set up camp in the village and strong police force has invaded the area. However, the people as whole appear to be taking the whole thing very coolly, not surprisi in a state that has witnessed the torture of the Bhagalpur blindm and the brutality of Pipra and Belchi. No one from the few sett ments on the Piparia-Bahariya road has visited the village. The le lessness of the area is all too well-known. Criminals have in rec years made it a practice to dump their victims in the 350 km stretch the 'holy Ganga' between Mokamhtal and Bhagalpur. They ha also perfected techniques to prevent bodies floating to the surf —they either chop them into little bits or slit their stomachs.

As a police officer says: "Be thankful to Jagdamba Mata th you are getting out of here alive. This is not a place inhabited by h mans, savages haunt this area." But others were also haunting the bl reaved settlements on the banks of the Ganga: the ghosts of childr innocent victims of an inhuman crime, for whom the women of Pip ria sent their lament into the cold winter air.

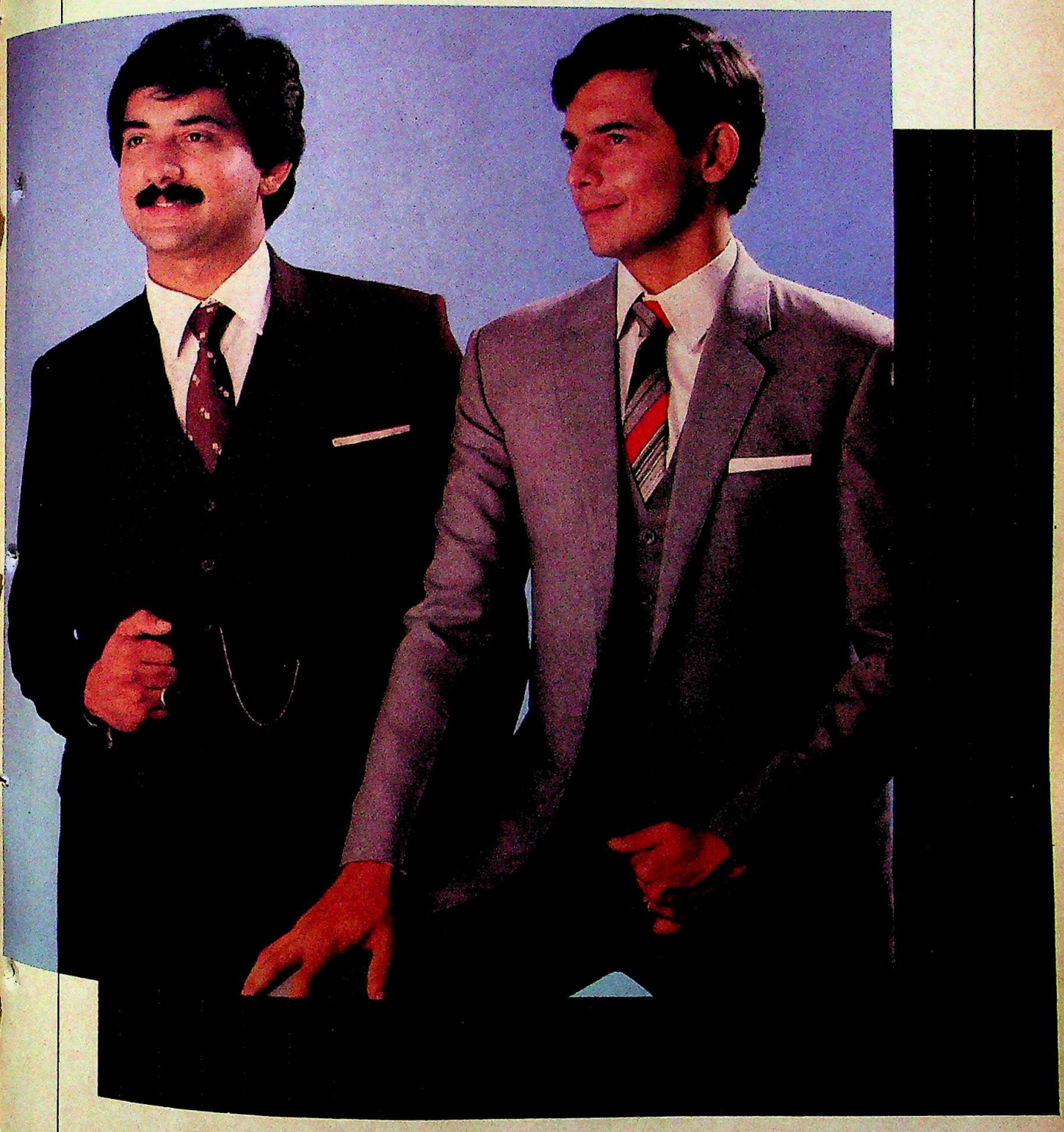
—PRABHA DUTT with FARZAND AHMED in Pa

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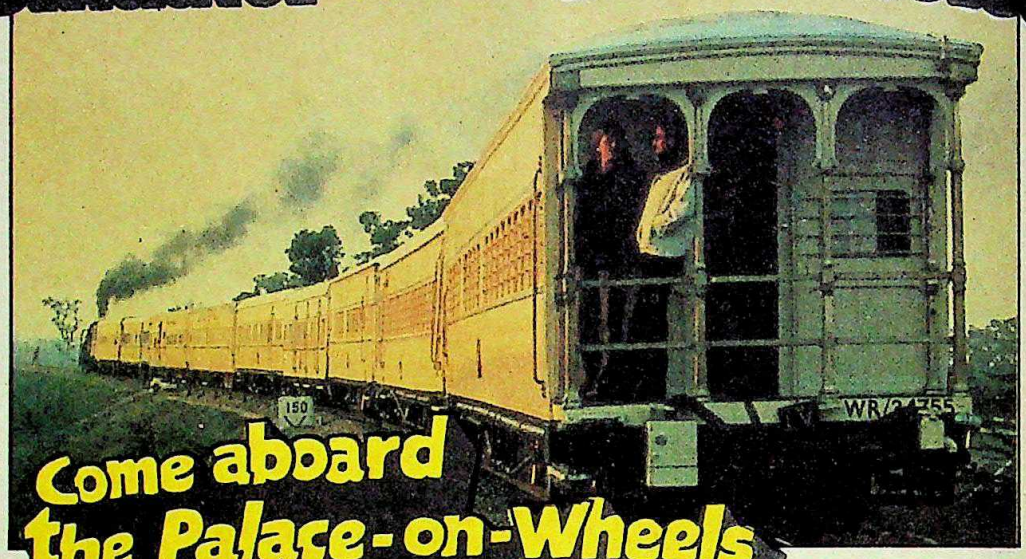
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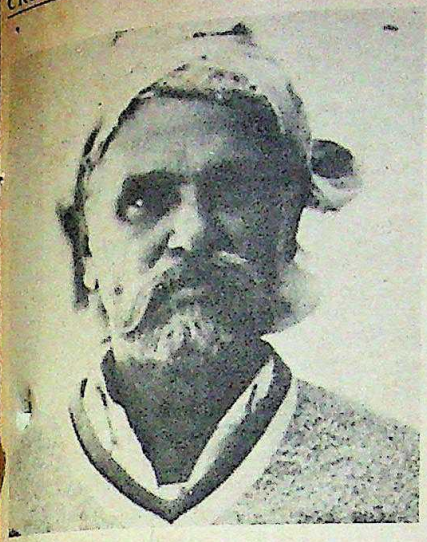
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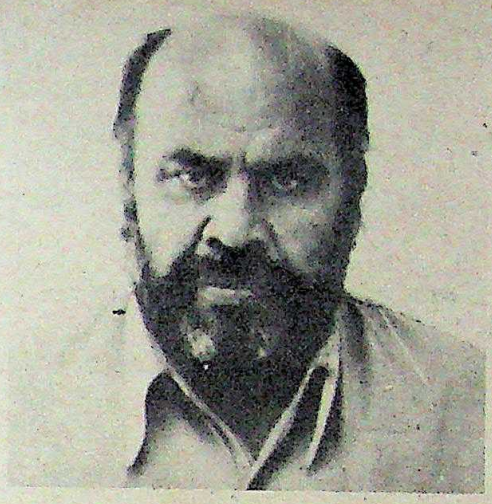
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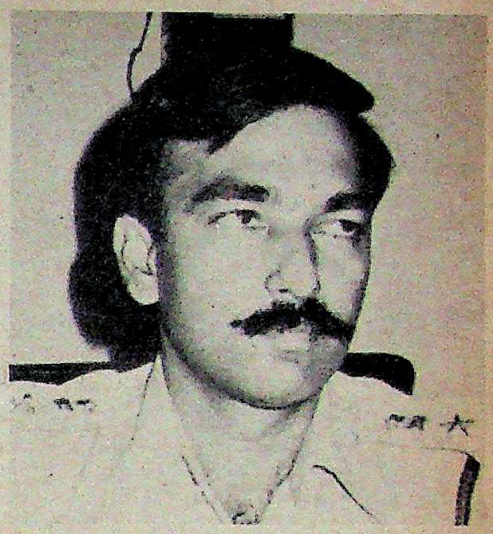
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(From left) Bachu Bafan, Sumer Bottle and DSP Kuldip Sharma: lucrative business

GUJARAT

Smuggling Secrets

BHUJ, the sleepy border town in Kutch district, is a convenient headquarters for spy rings. It is within easy reach of the Pakistan border. And the constant two-way traffic of smugglers across the inhospitable terrain of the Rann of Kutch provides the necessary cover for men who wish to combine espionage with the profitable business of smuggling.

Last fortnight, the comfortable little cross-border business was rudely interrupted when the police and intelligence agencies, working in tandem, pulled off what they claimed was a major coup. In a neat operation lasting 36 hours they hauled in eight men under the Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Act (COFEPOSA) from different parts of the state who they claimed were part of a well-established spying-cum-smuggling ring. Four of them were said to be passing on vital information to Pakistan and also from time to time sheltering Pakistanis illegally crossing into India.

Detailed Information: The police followed up the arrests by raiding the house of Ibrahim Bachu Bafan, a local Muslim leader. The results of the search are said to have come as a bit of a shock even to intelligence officers who have been working on the case. The police say they recovered a collection of 35 photographs of military and other sensitive installations in Kutch. These included a series of shots of Bhuj airport with close-ups of hangars and aircraft. There are also said to be a variety of shots of bridges, strategic stretches of road and even high tension wires. The photographs, in fact, cover just about everything that Pakistani pilots would need to know in order to disrupt communications and electricity. To make identification easier from the air all the shots were taken from elevated spots to include prominent landmarks.

The police have harboured suspicions about Bafan for a number of years. During the Emergency they had a warrant out for his arrest under MISA. Police say that he managed to stay out of their reach by slipping away to Karachi until the orders were withdrawn a year later.

During his period of exile in Karachi, the police say that Bafan met a Pakistani, Sumer Haji Kasam, who has also been trapped in the police dragnet. Kasam is a man with a colourful past and is known to his associates and the police as Sumer Bottle. He earned this name, apparently, during an earlier phase of his career when he is said to have been smuggling liquor out of ships docked in Karachi harbour. Later, intelligence officials say, Kasam was caught by Pakistani officials with contraband worth over Rs 2 crore. He and another associate Haji Hasam who were politically well-connected were told that the case against them would be dropped if they activated their smuggling contacts to provide information on military movements and installations in Kutch.

The police have undoubtedly had their share of luck in this case. They first nabbed Kasam after getting a routine tip-off that a Pakistani had crossed the border and was staying at Medi village. When Border Security Force men caught up with him they found he was carrying 15.8 kg of heroin worth Rs 12.8 lakh even in India, but which would have fetched anything near US $25 million in the American market.

After repeated interrogation Kasam is said to have come out with a detailed story implicating several men who the police have been after for years. Among these was Mithu Bawa who is now absconding, Juma Mohammed Vali who was arrested early last year for sheltering a suspected Pakistani spy (INDIA TODAY, March 31, 1983) and Bachaya Ahmed (INDIA TODAY, September 30, 1983). Bachaya is one of the eight men arrested this time. He has already been arrested seven times in the last 10 years on charges of ferrying people to and fro across the Indo-Pak border. He has, however, been let off by the court each time.

Spectacular Operations: If his account to the police is anything to go by, Kasam has also been involved in some pretty spectacular smuggling operations in the recent past. He is said to have admitted that last year he made six trips to India, bringing in altogether 200 slabs of silver valued at Rs 1.08 crore. He also revealed that soon after he reached India this time a consignment of 196 kg of charas was sent across the border. The charas was recovered by police from the farm of a man named Mahendrasinh Jadeja in Motichirai village. Mahendrasinh has been arrested and his son Aniruddh is absconding.

The case has confirmed that the state Government's fears about the extent of spying in the district were fully justified. The Government first displayed its concern when it posted Kuldip Sharma to the district as deputy superintendent of police. Sharma has a reputation for toughness and apparently his tactics have paid dividends. Sharma has also withstood numerous pressures to let off the men. He has also taken a series of measures including buying 32 more camels to intensify patrolling in the border areas. But it will need a lot of determined effort from the Government if the flood of spies and smugglers is to be slowed down.

—RAMESH MENON in Bhuj

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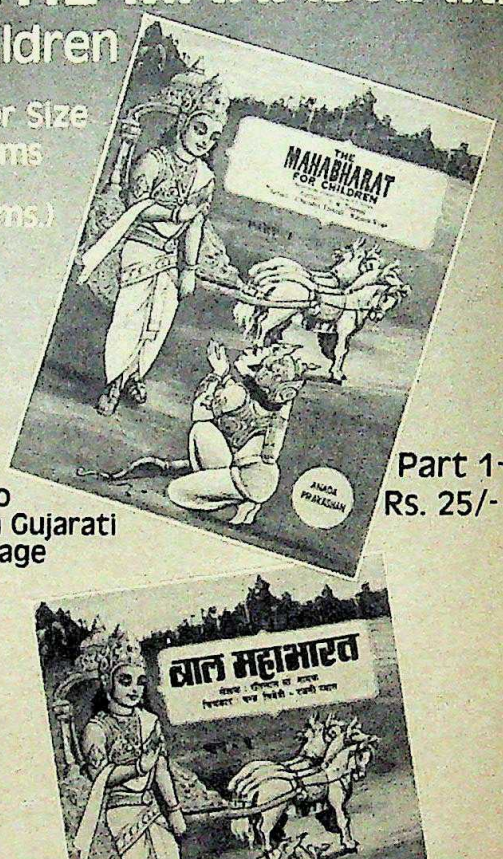
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UNITED STATES

Near Miss for Air-India

DECEMBER 12, 1983. 5 p.m. Captain S.C. Singh manoeuvres Air-India's 747 Boeing into what should be a routine landing at John F. Kennedy Airport, when to his amazement he sees the lights of a twin-engine Piper Seneca still on the runway right in front of his roaring engines. Singh tilts the jet's wings swerving away from the Piper Seneca avoiding by seconds what could have been a major disaster.

THE INCIDENT has sparked off a controversy with Air-India officials blaming ground control at Kennedy Airport, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) officials palming it all off on Air-India's pilot, and the media covering the story with markedly biased slants against Air-India.

Captain Singh, when told by ground control that Air-India should check the 747's wings for damage, decided the matter was serious enough to file a "Near Miss Incident" report. At that point, according to Air-India, FAA officials suggested to Singh that it was unnecessary to blow up the incident and "why don't we keep this matter unofficial?" However, Singh, 51-year-old with 33 years' flying experience, insisted he wanted to file an official report.

Orders Unheard: Louis Achitoff, the FAA's director for public relations in New York, stated that the ground control told the Air-India pilot to "reduce to final approach speed please" and then "Air-India 101, go around, maintain runway heading." Achitoff alleged that the pilot acknowledged the instructions and then proceeded to do exactly the opposite. "When our controller saw the Boeing was landing, he ordered the Piper Seneca, which had landed a few minutes before, to get off the runway," he said. FAA officials claim that when Singh was told to "go around" he was supposed to circle around until further instructions.

Air-India's Public Relations Manager, M.M. Chudasama, emphatically disagreed: "When a pilot is told to reduce to final approach speed, it is a commitment from the control tower for the plane to land and rarely is a pilot asked to abort the landing."

Although FAA officials claim, "go around, maintain runway heading" was transmitted and acknowledged, Air-India officials maintain that those particular words are not clearly audible on the tape. When the tape was played for INDIA TODAY, those words were indeed unintelligible. In fact, in the official transcript of the tape issued by the FAA themselves, that sentence is hypothetically filled in yet marked "unintelligible" by them.

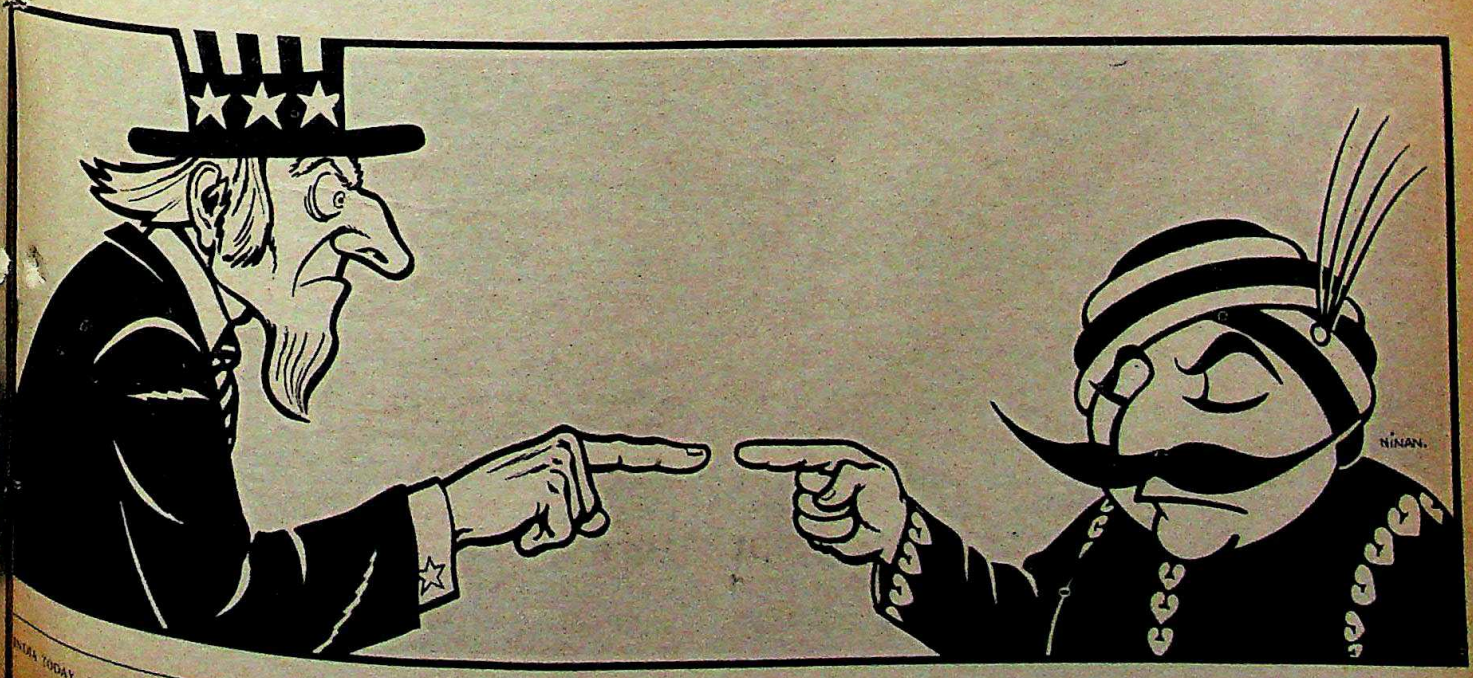
Defending Position: Air-India officials claim that according to the tape, the small aircraft in front of the Boeing failed to turn off the runway onto the correct taxiway. The Piper Seneca missed two taxiways and at one point requested permission to reverse direction while on the runway. Air-India is definite that Singh landed after he was cleared by ground control and there was no error made by the pilot.

Achitoff, on the other hand, said: "The Air-India pilot landed without a clearance. Secondly, whether or not the pilot heard the order or understood the order to 'go around' the transmission was made and the pilot acknowledged it. Third, the pilot was on a local frequency, he could hear the transmission between ground control and the Piper Seneca. It should have raised a question in his mind regarding a possible 'go around'. Furthermore, if transmission is unclear at any point, the pilot is obliged to ask ground control to repeat instructions. The Air-India pilot acknowledged instructions with 'Roger'."

Captain Lalkaka, operations manager of the western division of Air-India, flew in from London on December 16 for meetings with FAA officials when a re-recording of the tape was played.

Following Instructions: At the meetings, Air-India maintained that their pilot was cleared for approach for landing at runway 13L and broke cloud at 300 ft. Traffic control advised him to continue his landing and as he was reaching for reverse thrust, he saw flashing lights on his right and saw a small unidentified aircraft trying to clear the runway. Air-India pointed out that Singh had not been advised by the control tower of any aircraft being in the vicinity of the runway nor had he overheard any conversation between the controller and the other aircraft.

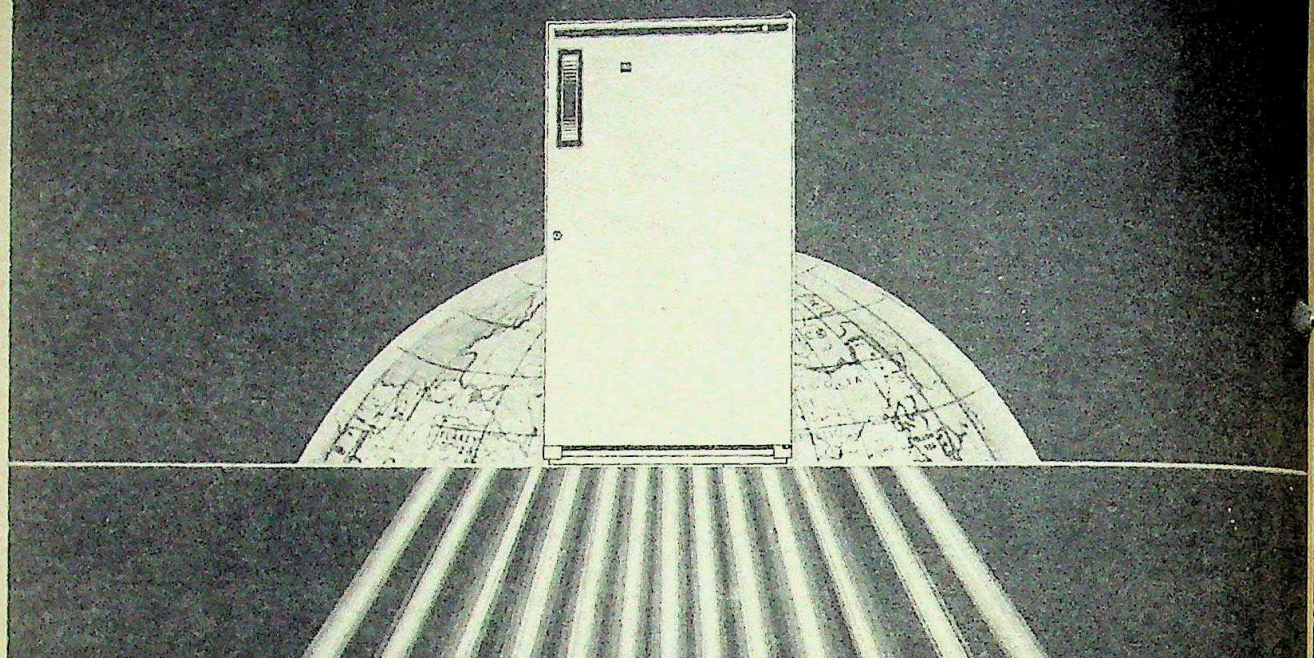
Elbowing into the FAA and Air-India's locked horns, the New York press added a third dimension to the controversy. The day after the incident, the *Daily News* reported: "Susan Hawes, an FAA duty officer in Washington, said, a Piper Seneca trying to land on the same runway as the Air-India jet about 5 p.m. was told to 'make the next taxiway exit and was cleared to go around.' Instead, she said, the small plane landed without clearance 'and the standard separation (between two planes) was lost.'"



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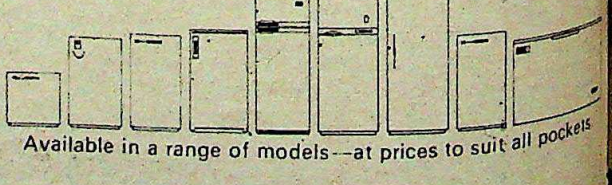


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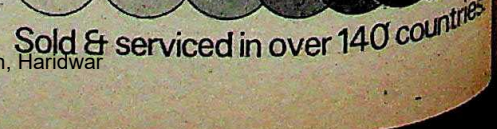


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The FAA in New York later denied that Susan Hawes had made such a statement and insisted that she had been misquoted.

COVERING the story on the same day, WABC-TV on Eyewitness News had reporter John Johnson saying: "...The air traffic control tower notices the jet approaching too rapidly. A small commuter plane still on the runway. Air traffic control calls the Air-India jet, and gives the command, 'Go around, go around'. The Air-India pilot acknowledges the command with 'Roger, Roger.' For some strange reason, however, the Air-India jet doesn't abort the landing; instead comes straight in without landing permission, almost hitting the small commuter plane, which by now had managed to pull off the runway, out of the path of the incoming jet."

There's no explanation of how Johnson came to the conclusion that the jet was "approaching too rapidly". FAA officials never brought that up as a possibility nor was it stated as a fact by anyone connected to the incident. The first time the issue of the jet approaching too fast was brought up by Johnson with no basis to support such a theory.

Adverse Reporting: Johnson then proceeded on to the Air-India's offices at Kennedy Airport, cornered an unsuspecting Air-India employee to ask: "Do you know anything about it?" The Air-India officer replied: "What's the problem? You'd like to interview the pilot?" To which Johnson responded: "No, any statement by Air-India as to why the pilot did that or what was wrong?" The Air-India officer cautiously said: "I can't tell you." Johnson hurriedly: "You don't know? Okay, thank you."

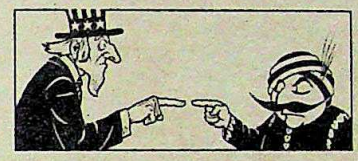
Johnson ended his report with: "If pilot error is found to be the cause of the near miss, the FAA has no jurisdiction over the pilot, since he flies for a foreign carrier. It would be up to Air-India to discipline the pilot." Television viewers were left with the assumption that the Air-India pilot was guilty until proven innocent. The damage to Air-India's image cannot be underscored.

On December 14, WABC-TV came up with yet another angle. After repeating the story that the Air-India pilot landed without clearance and nearly hit a plane, they added: "Now one possible cause for confusion, a problem understanding English, the international language for pilots. And today, Louis Young heard about that from one pilot."

Biased Briefings: Clearly, reporter Louis Young went to a great deal of trouble to unearth a pilot who spoke little English —a pilot from the Dominican Republic who had nothing to do with Air-India. Young interviewed him and did his best to egg him on. The pilot managed to say: "There are some problems, you know, in communications with...um...um...uh...um...with...um...with the aircraft and with the ground. Ground control is also speaking English."

In response to INDIA TODAY's query as to what the Dominican Republic pilot was doing in the Air-India story, WABC-TV's spokesman said: "Well, we were talking about foreign pilots in general." With a lead-in about the Air-India near miss? Why could they not speak to an Air-India pilot and put him on the air? According to WABC-TV, not a single Air-India pilot could be found.

On December 16, Johnson, now at the peak of his heady "exclusive" played the released tapes on the air. Significantly, right at



The incident has sparked off a controversy with Air-India officials blaming ground control at Kennedy Airport, Federal Aviation Administration officials palming it all off on Air-India's pilot, and the media covering the story with a markedly biased stance against Air-India.

the point of the sections that were unclear, Johnson interrupted and said: "Air-India, 101, go around, climb and maintain runway heading." Then the Air-India pilot's voice on tape responds to Johnson's voice, "Roger."

Johnson then concluded: "Clear on the tapes is not only the command for the Air-India flight to go around and an affirmative Roger from the pilot, but also the warning from air traffic control, once they realised the Air-India jet was just coming straight in, to the small plane on the ground to turn right and get off the runway."

False Claims: Interviewing an FAA spokesman, Johnson then proceeded: "So, in other words, while there may have been a pilot error, here, your hands are tied, to do any terms of disciplining of the pilot, because he's a foreign carrier. Eyewitness News tried to interview a spokesman for Air-India regarding Monday's near mishap and why their pilot didn't hear air traffic's control to go around. Well, Air-India was unavailable at this time for comment."

However, Chudasama stated emphatically, no one at Air-India had been contacted by WABC-TV news.

It is obvious that TV reporters have a stake in trying to get on the air as often as possible for their own survival. WABC-TV's spokesman for Johnson, who himself refuses to speak to reporters, said: "Johnson was following the FAA's version of the tape."

Another aspect of the FAA's defensive behaviour is that since the traffic controllers' strike two years ago and their replacement by workers in order to break the strike, the training and capabilities of the new ground controllers have been repeatedly questioned.

In Defence: Meanwhile, Air-India announced that they and the Government of India were conducting an investigation into the matter. In an attempt to salvage Air-India's image, Nani Mital, Air-India's regional director of US and Canada, made a statement to WABC-TV news which was partially carried by the station. Mital said: "It is significant that at the most critical portion of the tape during which the controller allegedly directed the Air-India commander to 'go around', the words heard by the Air-India officials for whom the re-recording was played appear to be at variance with the written transcript provided to the Air-India officials by the FAA. In view of this discrepancy, Air-India has requested the FAA for additional tapes to assist in its investigation."

It was a rather peculiar circumstance that when Air-India officials first went to hear the tape, directly after the incident, they were told by the FAA that they could not do so because the machine was broken—an unusual situation in the US.

Explaining Action: Mital also said: "Many more questions remain to be investigated, including the degree of separation maintained between flight 101 and the small commuter aircraft, and the reaction of the air traffic controller to radar information showing that flight 101 was continuing to descend and therefore may not have heard the alleged 'go around' directive."

As far as the accusation that the "near miss" was caused by a language problem, an Air-India official said: "Contrary to the implication in certain media accounts, Air-India's flight crews are required to be fluent in English and have no difficulty in their communications with US air traffic controllers. The absence of such communication difficulties with respect to flight 101 or any Air-India operations at Kennedy Airport during the past 23 years was confirmed by the FAA."

It is patently absurd to try and pillory Indian pilots on their knowledge of English. India is no Dominican Republic, and Indians have been speaking English almost as long as the US has been around.

—MADHU TREHAN

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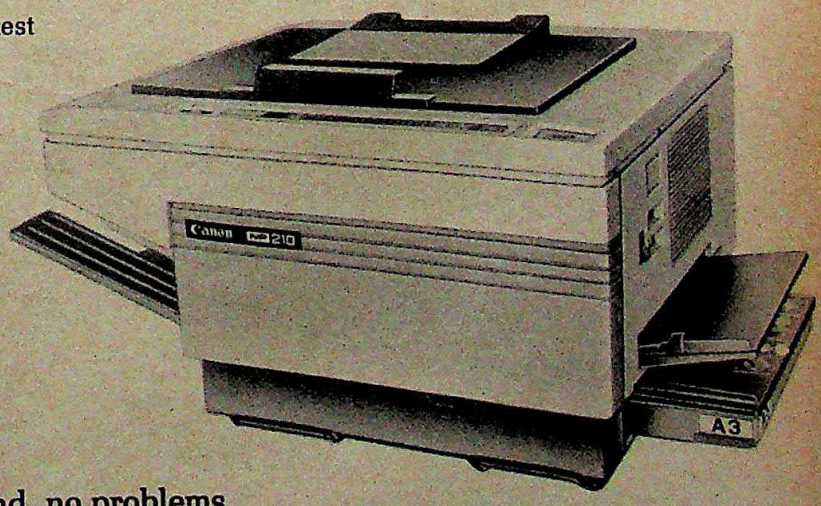
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UNITED KINGDOM

Tiger by the Tail

THE RAJ is quite literally all the rage, particularly in West Bengal where a British television film on Subhas Chandra Bose—aired last fortnight in Britain—has snowballed into a major controversy. The film, made by the independent television company, Granada, has raised Bengali hackles along with strident complaints that it is a total distortion of history and portrays Bose and his Indian National Army (INA) in the poorest of lights.

Even before the film was publicly aired, the Indian high commissioner in London, who had been sent a copy of the transcript, had written to Granada's chairman objecting to the commentary and requesting a revision of certain statements made in the film. The film figured in the Indian Parliament and the four ex-INA members who appear in the film telegraphed Granada demanding that their interviews be deleted from the final version. Sisir Bose, nephew of Subhas Chandra and custodian of the Netaji Research Bureau in Calcutta also promptly withdrew permission for material supplied by the Centre to be used in the film.

Strong Complaints: The objections, however, were either ignored or arrived too late since *The War of the Springing Tiger*, as Granada chose to title its film, appeared on British television screens last fortnight in its original and objectionable form and at peak viewing time. The film runs the usual gamut of television documentary formats with authentic footage of the period interspersed with interviews of relevant contemporary figures. But contrary to what Granada had originally touted the film as, it ridicules Bose more often than not, employing such phrases as "a clown in jackboots" or "Fuhrer" and a "disciple of Marx and Mussolini" to describe Bose and makes much of Gandhi's reference to the INA as a "Bertram Mills circus".

What has added to the controversy is the introduction of Oxford-based author Nirad Chaudhuri as the "Indian voice" in the film. Chaudhuri's biting cynicism is as provocative as ever and his description of Nehru and Gandhi as "opportunists" in their support of INA prisoners under trial in Delhi in 1945 has prompted angry objections from the Indian High Commission. "It is a total distortion of history," charged Colonel Prem Sehgal, one of the INA members interviewed in the film, "Chaudhuri claims that Netaji was a worshipper of Hitler. There are several letters of Netaji to prove what he thought of Hitler."

Distortion: What has made the issue even more objectionable, however, is the fact that Granada's original synopsis of the film was almost wholly positive and purported to show a "factual account of Bose's political career". The former INA members interviewed for the film—Prem Sehgal, Abid Hasan, Shah Nawaz and Mohan Singh—were told that "it is time that the part played by Bose in the freedom struggle received due attention".

Earlier, the four INA members were flown to London to be interviewed and given the impression that their testaments would be central to the film. Dr Sisir Bose of the Netaji Research Bureau and India's leading scholar on the subject was given the same impression by David Boulton, the producer of the film. It was in that context that Bose permitted Granada to use its material. But according to them, the final version bears little resemblance to the version they were promised would appear.

Bose says that Boulton has dropped several interviews recommended by the bureau, including Lord Fenner Brockway who knew the INA leader well and would have provided a more objective portrait than the one Granada has painted. "The producer has deviated completely from the outline he gave us before embarking on the film," says Dr Bose who also says that he was not told that Nirad Chaudhuri was associated with the film. "I would certainly have objected had I known of his involvement," he says. Adds Abid Hasan: "We should have agreed to associate ourselves with the film only after seeing it. I admit it was a mistake on our part but the synopsis sounded perfectly fine".







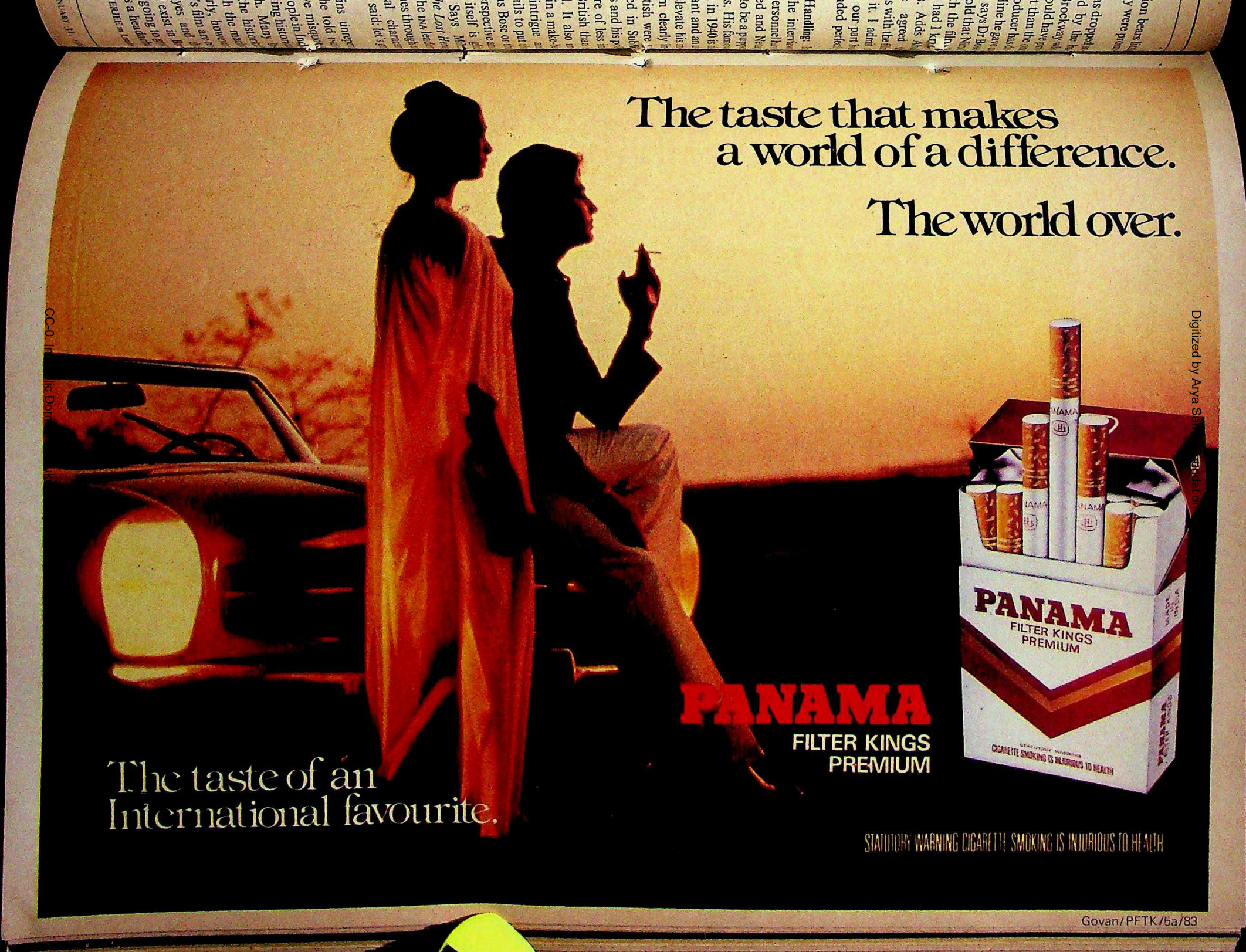
Netaji with Hasan (top), Sisir Bose (left) and Sehgal in INA uniform: distortion of history

Superficial Handling: In the final result, the interviews with the four INA personnel have been heavily edited and Netaji himself made out to be a puppet of the Axis powers. His famous escape from India in 1940 is dismissed as irrelevant and an attempt by him to elevate his importance. The film clearly implies that the British were the least interested in Subhas Bose's movements and his political activities were of less importance to the British than generally believed. It also implies that he lived in a make-believe world of intrigue and power. The film fails to put the activities of Subhas Bose or the INA in historical perspective and the commentary itself is glib and superficial. Says Michael Bose, author of *The Lost Hero*, the biography of the INA leader: "Subhas Bose comes through as a one-dimensional character who woke up one morning and said: let's get rid of the British."

Boulton, however, remains unrepentant. "I stand by the film," he told INDIA TODAY, "Some journalists have misquoted from the film and have upset people in India. Granada has a tradition of making historical documentaries based on truth. Many Indians do not want to know the historical truth. They prefer to exist with the mass myth of Bose as a God." Clearly, however, the historical truths in Boulton's film are coloured through Imperialist eyes and the hangovers of the Raj that still exist in Britain. It is one hangover that is going to give Granada and Bose's supporters a headache.

—DILIP BOBB with BONNY MUKHERJEE in London

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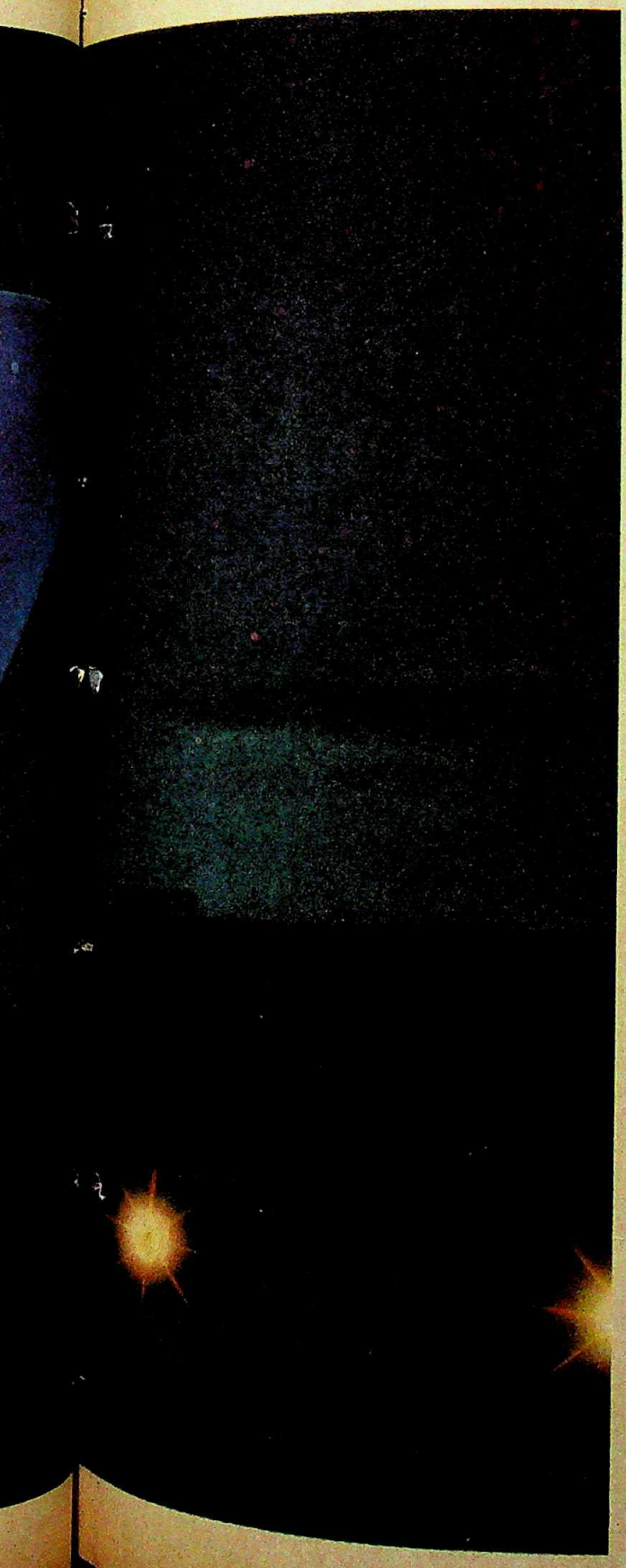


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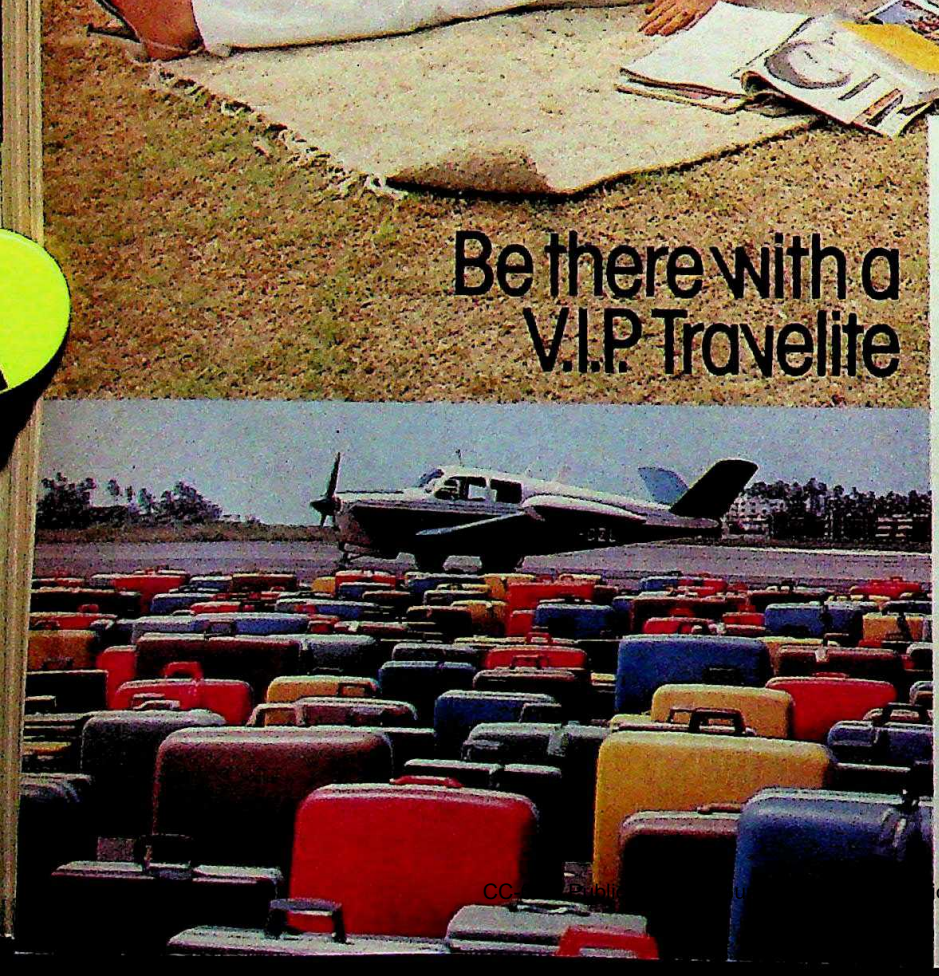
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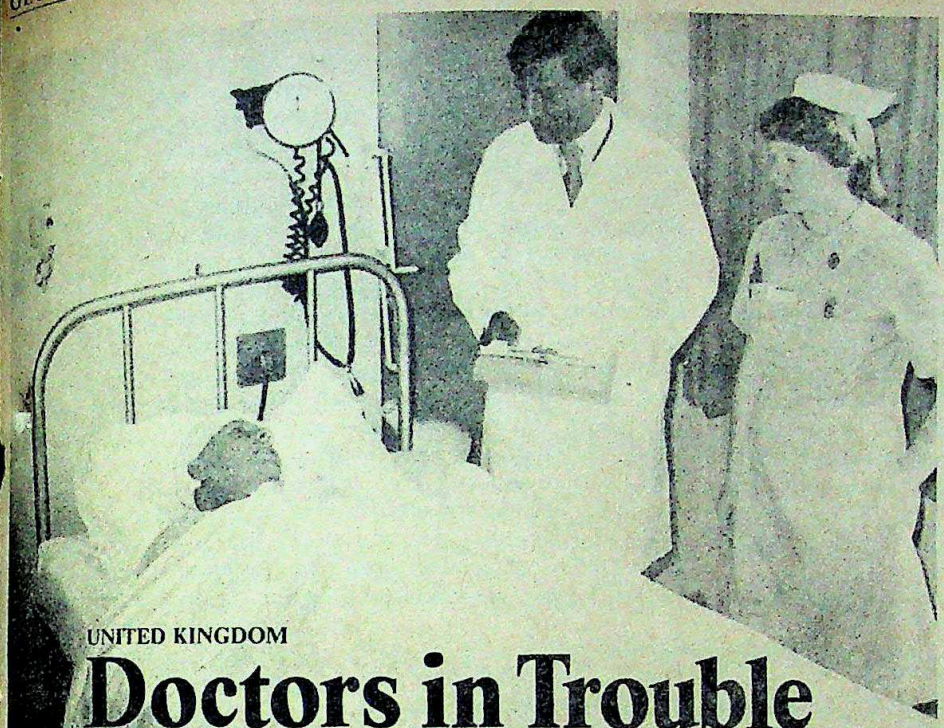
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An Indian doctor in a general hospital in Britain: unkept promises

UNITED KINGDOM

Doctors in Trouble

FOR THE past 15 years or so doctors from India could enter Britain easily, find full employment and study for a higher qualification in medicine. Now the special relationship that existed between Indian medical graduates and British hospitals has come under severe strain.

In 1978 a medical act was introduced by the British Government through which doctors from some Commonwealth countries could only get 'limited registration' in Britain. This meant that they could not practise in this country as doctors without fulfilling certain conditions. The terms of this act required doctors from the Indian subcontinent and African countries to work in a hospital for a limited period of five years.

During this test period overseas doctors were to have worked as hospital registrars for two years minimum to qualify for full registration. This special 'limited registration' ends this year and with its termination many doctors find themselves in a situation which requires them to return to India or live in Britain without the permission to work as doctors as many have not been able to fulfil the conditions required for practising in Britain.

The 'limited registration' scheme was meant to give many newly qualified doctors from abroad a chance to gain further training in teaching hospitals. The scheme had the blessing of the Indian Government. But in practice most overseas doctors have found jobs in good teaching hospitals difficult to get. "Most overseas doctors end up in dead-end jobs with no training. The promised training has not materialised," says Dr Krishna Korlipara, secretary of the Overseas Doctors Association which has over 8,000 members, the majority from the Indian subcontinent. Dr Korlipara also accused the British Government of exploiting overseas doctors: "They are simply used as pairs of hands to keep the health service going, rather than in posts where they could get proper training and higher qualifications."

Tough Going: Doctors who come to work in Britain are often offered work in provincial hospitals where there is little scope for training. British medical graduates are often reluctant to work in the provinces or in special hospitals such as geriatric or paediatric. Many such short-staffed hospitals under great pressure are often heavily manned by overseas doctors.

Indian doctors who wish to work in Britain have first to pass an English language proficiency test (PLAB) before they can apply for jobs to gain the required experience for full registration. Many find barriers all the way. Tej Kalra is a medical graduate from Ranchi Medical College, who came to Britain in 1977 to set up a general practice with her doctor husband who already had full registration. She was told she had to register for a higher degree to get a job. She agreed to do so and passed the MRCP/MRCS in 1981.

When Kalra applied for full registration to practise she was told by the British Medical Council (BMC) that she did not have the required number of years in hospital work. She then worked in temporary hospital jobs for two years but to date has still not been accepted for full registration. "I feel very depressed about it," said Kalra, "I have tried to fill all the required conditions but I don't seem to be getting anywhere." She pointed out that local graduates take just one year to get full registration. The BMC often gives poor grasp of the English language as a reason for not allowing overseas doctors to practise or work in hospitals. But Kalra has passed the PLAB already.

The BMC has also introduced a time limit for sitting for the MRCP qualification. Examination costs have also been increased from £100 (Rs 1,500) for the entire examination to £100 for every subject offered.

Little Encouragement: While many Indian doctors are interested in returning to work in India, the Indian Government has made no moves to encourage their return for fear of upsetting the Indian medical circle. The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research has a 'pool officer' scheme for those doctors who return to India to look for a job. The scheme allows them to work in designated hospitals for up to two years at a basic salary of Rs 1,500. An average doctor in Britain earns three times that figure in a month, but it is generally recognised that the situation is becoming difficult for them. A recent convention organised in London by the Modi Institution to recruit doctors for a new hospital in Delhi brought over 300 interested Indian doctors asking for information.

The Department of Health in Britain was reluctant to discuss the situation of the overseas doctors. A spokesman for the British Medical Association (BMA) said: "We are very concerned indeed that these doctors should have to return to India without the training they came for." The BMA and the Department of Health here are now considering a new kind of 'sponsorship' scheme to appoint overseas doctors to specific jobs with the proviso that they return to their countries at the end of their term of work.

Shivaji Basu is one Indian doctor who will be returning home from choice and who feels the situation will not change for the Indian doctors here. "I have decided that I have nothing to achieve here," said Basu. "I was fortunate in being able to get training in my own particular field of medicine, but I have always been encouraged by my superiors to return to work in India." Basu like many other Indian doctors is saving to buy expensive medical and surgical units which will facilitate his work in India.

The number of Indian doctors who will be directly affected by the ending of the 'temporary registration' scheme is around 300. With some 2,000 junior doctors now unemployed in Britain the British medical authorities are unlikely to want to make any concessions to overseas doctors.

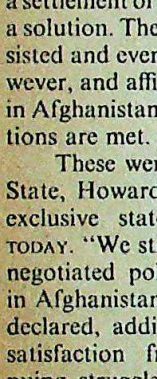
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UNITED STATES

Afghan Obsession



THERE is little evidence of new thinking on South Asia either in the Reagan Administration or in the think-tanks associated with it. For the United States, South Asia still means very largely the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. That traumatic event of the last week of December 1979 remains frozen in the American mind, which has taken little heed of the changes that have occurred in South Asia in the last four years. At the same time, the Reagan Administration has no plans for a settlement of the Afghan crisis. It has not helped the UN process for a solution. There are reports that the Reagan Administration has resisted and even halted that process. Officials strongly deny this, however, and affirm that the US would welcome a political settlement in Afghanistan through the UN effort, provided certain basic conditions are met.

These were spelled out by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Howard Schaffer, in an exclusive statement to INDIA TODAY. "We strongly support a negotiated political settlement in Afghanistan," the statement declared, adding: "We get no satisfaction from the continuing struggle there." Explaining the American stand on a political settlement in clear unambiguous terms, the statement said: "We have maintained that any negotiated political settlement for Afghanistan, besides including the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the return of the non-aligned and independent status of Afghanistan, and the return of the refugees, must include self-determination for the Afghan people." The US Government apparently does not know how these four conditions can be fulfilled, and is not willing to underwrite any accord that would not meet them. "We have not said how (the accord) must come about," the official statement added, "but that the issue of how the Afghan people will be allowed to form the type of government they wish must be addressed."

There is visible reluctance to think what for America is still unthinkable: that in the not distant future, in a year or two, a Pakistan government could choose to diminish Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan, lower Pakistan's military dependency on the US and improve relations with Afghanistan and the Soviet Union.

Divergent Perspectives: Those who are closely acquainted with the UN process—the "indirect" negotiations conducted among Pakistan, the Soviet Union and Afghanistan through the good offices of the UN special envoy, Diego Cardovez, are struck by the asymmetry between US and Pakistani priorities for a political settlement. For Pakistan, the most important issue is the return of the 3 million Afghan refugees to their homes. Since this is not possible without Soviet withdrawal and political change, Pakistan has been negotiating with Moscow and Kabul how the two latter conditions could be worked out. In the UN negotiations, the Soviets agreed to pull out all their troops within an agreed time frame, but Moscow and Islamabad differed widely on what exactly the time frame should be. According to reliable reports, Pakistan suggested six months while the Soviet Union was pitching for a period of 12 to 18 months. Pakistan has no way to ensure political change in Afghanistan, but the Soviets cannot pull out their troops without making the Kabul regime broad-based and acceptable to the bulk of the refugees.

For the United States, the most important factor is political change in Afghanistan. The statement given to INDIA TODAY by Schaffer implies that refugee organisations must be associated with the negotiation process and must approve of political change, which must be more than cosmetic. Return of the refugees comes third on the US list whereas for Pakistan it is the most urgent issue.

The UN negotiating process remains halted since June, and there is no prospect of the negotiations being resumed in the immediate future. The Pakistan Foreign Minister, Sahabzada Yakub Khan, met officials of the State Department in November and had more than one round of talks with the UN secretary-general. However, the stalemate in the UN process remains unbroken. There have been reports in the US press that Yakub Khan's eagerness to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union has alienated "the military" in Pakistan. Some members of the ruling military caucus are said to have raked up Yakub Khan's defiance of the order of the then military ruler of Pakistan, General Yahya Khan, to use military force to crush the Bangladesh movement in early April 1971 when Yakub Khan was governor of East Pakistan.

American assessments of Soviet gains and losses in Afghanistan differ considerably. There is a steady trickle of reports, emanating from Afghan refugee organisations or their sympathisers in America, suggesting that the rebels are doing increasingly well and that with more military help, they could make it very bad for the Soviets in Afghanistan. A spokesman of the refugees claimed in Washington in early November that in three or four more years "we shall be able to force the Soviets to leave Afghanistan".

Facing Facts: Sober, responsible and objective assessments, however, present a very different picture. Drew Middleton, military correspondent of *The New York Times*, reported on December 4 that resistance to the Soviets had reduced in Afghanistan as a result of "shortage of anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons and rivalry between pro-western and pro-Iranian rebel groups". At least three of the six rebel groups are said to be pro-Iran; fighting has broken out "in several places" between these groups and their rivals. Both American and British intelligence sources believed, according to Middleton, that the "Russians, with the Afghan army's help, can police the country with one division, about 10,000 men. The rest of the occupying force, estimated at 110,000 to 120,000 men, is being trained in an environment unfamiliar to a Soviet army trained for operations in Western Europe and northern China".

Middleton added that "western analysts, surveying the present situation, say they wonder whether the trend toward Soviet domination is irreversible". This is one way of saying that American analysts have begun to think that Afghanistan can never be extricated from Soviet influence. There are conflicting reports on arms supplies to the rebels. *Newsweek* reported in early November that the CIA was financing a $1 million (Rs 1 crore) arms supplies programme, most of the arms being provided by Egypt. Middleton, on the other hand, quoted the head of a pro-western Afghan rebel group as saying that the insurgents were promised $25 million (Rs 25 crore) in western arms but received only $6 million (Rs 6 crore) worth. "Western sources have said that Pakistan is skimming the cream of arms deliveries," Drew Middleton wrote.

American analysts also differ on the experience the Soviets may have accumulated in Afghanistan to intervene in a contingency in the Persian Gulf. Pentagon sources confirm Selig Harrison's claim that the Soviets have not built the infrastructure in Afghanistan to handle

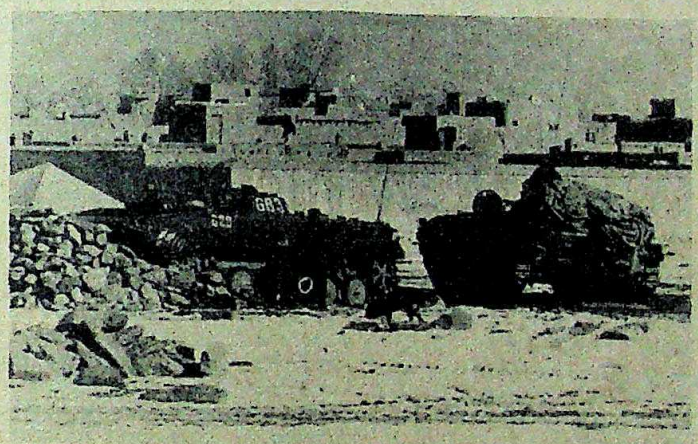
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large military aircraft; the airports are still suitable only for helicopters and relatively small planes. British intelligence sources, on the other hand, told Middleton that "the Soviets must now be considered a military factor in the Persian Gulf, which is only a few minutes flying time away from their major new bases in Afghanistan".

IN THE last six months, the Soviets have come to terms with two major rebel groups operating in two different zones in Afghanistan. As a result, these groups have stopped fighting. Evidently, the Karmal regime, with Soviet backing, is now trying to work out with local sardars a fabric of peaceful coexistence in which the local tribal chiefs will enjoy a lot of autonomy, and the Kabul regime will go slow on economic and social reforms. A Soviet official at the UN, explaining Moscow's long-term strategy for Afghanistan, said: "We are helping Afghans build a new Afghanistan for the younger generation."Illustrating his point, the Soviet official said that about 15,000 young Afghans were now studying in the USSR, and about 5,000 Afghan children were sent to camps in the Soviet Union every year.

Several people have therefore raised the question in recent days of whether the Reagan Administration will be given use of port and other facilities in Pakistan should it decide to intervene with force to keep the Strait of Hormuz open. Officials in Washington deny that the US has asked or will be asking Pakistan for base facilities. However, there is no strong denial of implicit suggestions that the Americans do operate intelligence facilities in Pakistan close to the Caucasian and Black Sea concentrations of Soviet military installations.



Soviet encampment in Kabul: American preoccupation

Changing Situation: Of the changing realities in Pakistan which people in the Reagan Administration appear to see but notice not, two deserve special mention. Neither the State Department nor the Pentagon, nor indeed the major pro-Reagan think-tanks, seem to believe that political change in Pakistan is imminent. There is visible reluctance to think what for America is still unthinkable: that in the not distant future, in a year or two, a Pakistan government could choose to diminish Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan, lower Pakistan's military dependency on the US and improve relations with Afghanistan and the Soviet Union.

The second factor in Pakistan that American policy-makers seem to be unwilling to take into account is the post-1980 Pakistani experience of dealing with the Soviet Union as an immediate neighbour. Americans concede that Moscow has behaved with Pakistan all these four years with restraint and sophistication, but they are unprepared to think of the impact the Soviet behaviour may have had on the Pakistani mind.

"Like many others, I too exaggerated the implications of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan," observed Professor Robert Tucker, of the John Hopkins University, Washington, who drew a lot of attention in the mid-'70s with his suggestion that the US should physically take over the oil installations in the Persian Gulf and Arabia in order to prevent the oil-rich Arab governments from denying the flow of petroleum to the western countries and Japan. "It looked like an offensive operation in those days in view of what had happened in Iran," Tucker recalled. "At this remove of time, it seems that the Soviet move was largely defensive, and in any case, the Soviets have been finding it difficult to stay in Afghanistan."

Professor Tucker is not the only American specialist in international relations who would try to make it possible for the Soviets to pull out their troops from Afghanistan because they believe that this would be in America's and Pakistan's interest. But they are in a minority; and what is more important, academic experts and specialists do not make the foreign policy of the Reagan Administration. For those who do, Afghanistan is a symbol of the current state of US-Soviet relationship and of Moscow's expansionist thrusts.

Pressure Tactics: The Reagan Administration therefore would not relent on Afghanistan except in the context of a limited thaw in the second cold war. People in the State Department do not seem to be unaware of the apprehensions Pakistanis have on this account. The Pakistan Government cannot afford to see the Afghan issue resolved at the superpower level, presenting Islamabad with what Agha Shahi, former foreign minister of Pakistan, used to call a "second Yalta".

Pakistanis are afraid that Reagan would offer the Soviets some accommodation on Afghanistan in order to bring Moscow back to the arms control negotiating table, since in the election year of 1984 he must convince Americans that his objective is peace with the adversary superpower, not confrontation and war.

However paradoxical it may sound, some American policy-makers are now more nervous about the future of US relations with Pakistan than with India. State Department officials believe that the recent improvement in Indo-US bilateral relations with continue mainly because the stimulus has been coming from the highest levels in the two governments. Differences on world issues will also remain, but these are not likely to overly cloud the developing bilateral relationship.

American officials at the same time realise that Indo-US amity is still fragile; it is constantly strained by the two countries' very different positions on most global issues. In the Reagan Administration, the State Department continues to be the steadfast advocate of good relations with India but it has to face a lot of sniping from the Pentagon and the White House.

Different Perceptions: State is more doubtful and apprehensive about Pakistan than the Pentagon and the White House. State seems to be closer to the realities in Pakistan than the two other powerful limbs of the foreign policy making apparatus. But the State Department is apparently persuaded that General Zia-ul-Haq will do nothing that may incur the displeasure of the White House. When Americans close to the Administration talk about political change in Pakistan, they imply a change of leadership of the military regime and not change of the regime itself. One gets the impression that the US would not be averse to Zia being elbowed out at a certain stage by another general who would be a more reliable ally. One gets no impression that Americans are expecting political change in Pakistan through elections. At the same time, Americans in Islamabad are keeping in touch with some political leaders including leaders of parties belonging to the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy.

The Congress is indifferent to South Asia except when it faces questions like annual approval of military and economic aid to Pakistan, which it readily approves, and nuclear proliferation possibility in Pakistan or India. "The Congress has no vision of India or South Asia," observed Dr Stanley Higginbothams, director of the foreign division of the Congressional Research Service, and added: "It is good for India in a way, because a greater awareness of India would make many congressmen oppose whatever aid is going out to Delhi." This is not because they are hostile to foreign aid.

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MAHARISHI TECHNOLOGY

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SOLVING PROBLEMS OF GOVERNMENTS CREATING IDEAL CIVILIZATION ON EARTH

A TASTE OF UTOPIA—DEC. 17–JAN. 6, 1984

The World Government of the Age of Enlightenment offered last month to solve the problems of all governments.

In the same wave of inspiration, Maharishi International University has now planned to give a sample taste of utopia to all mankind.

Seven thousand experts in the Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field will assemble at MIU from December 17 to January 6 to collectively create a strong influence of coherence and positivity in the whole world.

This unique demonstration of global coherence, originating from one place and reaching all parts of the world, will inspire governments to follow this example in their own countries and create a group of experts in the Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field so that negative trends do not arise in the country, law and order are spontaneously maintained, and administration becomes simple, effective, free from problems, and free from the elements of fear and punishment. Real freedom will be enjoyed by the people and by the government.



His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

Founder of the Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field (1983), Founder of Maharishi International University (1971), and Founder of the World Government of the Age of Enlightenment (1976).

"It is fulfilling to proclaim that with the discovery of the unified field of all the laws of nature and the development of the technology of the unified field, and with the authority that every government enjoys in its country, there is nothing that cannot be accomplished by a sovereign government. Now not only can every government rise above the reach of problems but also it can attain any desired height of achievement." —Maharishi

THE UNIFIED FIELD

The unified field is described by the supergravity theory of quantum physics as a super-symmetric (perfectly balanced), non-Abelian (self-interacting) field of pure intelligence, which generates the fundamental particles and forces of nature through its infinitely self-referral dynamics at the Planck scale of nature's functioning (10^{-33} cm. or 10^{-43} sec.), giving rise to the infinite diversity of the universe.

MODERN SCIENCE VEDIC SCIENCE

The discovery of the unified field as a self-referral reality through the objective approach of modern science, the experience of this self-referral reality as the simplest state of human awareness—transcendental consciousness—gained through the subjective approach of ancient Vedic Science as recently brought to light by Maharishi, and the benefits of this experience verified through a large body of scientific research have given rise to the Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field, which trains the individual to function from the self-referral level of nature's functioning so that nature's perfect balance, supreme efficiency, infinite organizing power, and unlimited creativity are available in daily life.

UTOPIA

The Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field has placed mankind on the doorstep of utopia—the unified field based civilization. Trends and tendencies in society will be maintained in the evolutionary direction, bringing fulfillment to all areas of governmental responsibility, including administration, education, defense, health, rehabilitation, economics, and agriculture.

Government

PROBLEM-FREE ADMINISTRATION

The Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field applied to administration offers to every government that supreme efficiency with which nature governs the universe, without altering the present system of government in any way.

This beautiful approach of bringing national law into alliance with natural law strengthens the government and improves the destiny of the nation in such a balanced and natural way that the creation of an ideal society can be a reality for any sovereign nation within as short a time as is desired.

In his Absolute Theory of Government, Maharishi explains that every government, irrespective of its system, is an innocent mirror of its nation. The strength and success of the government depends upon the strength and integrity of national consciousness. Since the government draws its inspiration and vitality from the collective consciousness of the people, it is essential that the government does whatever it can to maintain the highest quality of national consciousness.

All trends and tendencies in the country are fundamentally governed by the laws of nature. The unified field, being the fountainhead of all the laws of nature, underlies all aspects of national life and as such is available everywhere. Furthermore, the means of enlivening the unified field in national consciousness is also available everywhere, in the brain physiology of each individual in every country. Thus, every government already has in its population everything that it could ever need to make life fulfilling and the nation ideal. It is just a matter of knowing how to use the nation's most precious resource—the brain physiology of every citizen.

"Human brain physiology is that hardware of the cosmic computer which through proper programming, can draw upon the cosmic software of nature to accomplish anything." —Maharishi

What is fortunate is that only the square root of one percent of the population of the country (a slightly larger proportion for a country with a small population) practicing the Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field in any one place in the country is sufficient to fully awaken national consciousness. What is still more fortunate is that any group, regardless of education or economic status, can be trained to create this desired effect. What is most fortunate is that MIU is prepared to train such groups at its campuses in Iowa and in Washington, D.C., or in any country at the invitation of its government, universities, public or private organizations, or any one well-wisher of the nation.

Governments have always enjoyed their parental role of bringing maximum happiness to their people. The benefits that the Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field brings to all fields of life are so extensively documented by scientific research that any head of state can adopt, without reservation, this practical knowledge of the unified field to fulfill his aspiration to do maximum for his people and the world.

Now the knowledge of the unified field and the availability of the technology of the unified field make it mandatory for every government to base its administration on the infinite organizing power of the unified field of natural law.

Education

UNFOLDING CREATIVE GENIUS

The Maharishi Unified Field Based Integrated System of Education offers a new approach to teaching whereby every lesson is taught with reference to the knowledge of the whole discipline and the source of all disciplines is shown to be the field of pure intelligence, which the student experiences in the simplest state of his own awareness, transcendental consciousness.

The student grows in the awareness that all branches of knowledge are different modes of his own intelligence. His creative genius blossoms as his awareness is identified more and more fully with pure intelligence, the unified field of all the laws of nature. Instinctively, his thoughts are right; he does not make mistakes; his behavior is spontaneously evolutionary. He grows in ideal citizenship—the ability to fulfill his own interests and promote the interests of the whole society simultaneously.

The numerous benefits of this integrated system of education have been verified through a large body of scientific research and are further demonstrated in the high quality of life of MIU students and their

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OF THE UNIFIED FIELD

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natural focus on academic study, from primary level to Ph.D.

This unified field based approach, which raises life to be lived in full accord with natural law, can be easily introduced to fulfill the goals of any system of education without the need to revise the existing curriculum. Educators from all countries are invited for training in this ideal system of education.

Defense

VICTORY BEFORE WAR

Maharishi's contribution in the field of defense is invincibility for every nation. The Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field offers absolute defense in that it eliminates the very need for defending by preventing the birth of an enemy. This approach promotes life in accordance with natural law, maintains evolutionary trends within the country, and radiates life-supporting influences in all directions, automatically preventing the birth of an enemy.

The need for defense has its basis in fear, which is caused by stress. Since education does not train the people to think and act spontaneously in accordance with the full potential of natural law, the whole population is violating the laws of nature, causing stress, fear, and weakness, and creating the need for defense.

Destructive means of defense can at best leave the enemy in a state of fear, which can serve only to postpone confrontation. History records that destructive means of defense have always proven suicidal for any nation. Fortunately, those days are now coming to an end.

The predominant sense of restraint observed in the family of nations today with regard to the use of nuclear arms demonstrates the growth of the most fortunate, tender quality of life—the desire of the leaders of the world to ensure security without destroying life. This noble search of world leadership finds its fulfillment in the Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field, which offers absolute defense by bringing nourishment to life.

This unified field based approach has raised defense from the ground of ignorance and cruelty to the heights of wisdom and compassion. Nourishing the hearts of all nations, every nation will enjoy invincibility. Victory before war is the clarion call of unified field based defense.

Health

REVERSAL OF AGING

Maharishi's unified field based approach to health simultaneously promotes the health of the individual and the collective health of the nation by bringing life into accordance with the full potential of natural law.

This approach produces perfect integration of mind, body, and behavior and eliminates imbalance, leaving no chance for weakness to remain on any level of life—individual, national, or international.

Immortality, being a quality of the unified field, is enlivened on every level of life through this unified field based approach to health. This brings perfect health and longevity to the individual and the nation. Perfect health is marked by the ability to use the full creative potential of life in the state of fulfillment.

Extensive scientific research indicates improvements in all areas of health, including reversal of the aging process, through the Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field (Ref.: Scientific research papers in four volumes, 2800 pages).

Rehabilitation

RESTORING BALANCE

The Maharishi Unified Field Based Integrated System of Rehabilitation eliminates stress and restores balance in the individual and his environment. It eliminates negativity in life, promotes evolutionary tendencies, and offers the perfect means of rehabilitation by naturally raising life to be lived in accordance with all the laws of nature.

This ideal approach to crime prevention and rehabilitation has been validated by extensive scientific research, including studies in prisons showing improved mental and physical health, reduced negativity and hostility, and reduced recidivism. It has also been used in probationary sentencing as a positive alternative to incarceration.

Now it is within the reach of every government to empty its prisons and uphold life in its full dignity.

Economics

FULFILLING PROSPERITY

The contribution of the Maharishi Unified Field Based Integrated System of Economics is unlimited for the simple reason that creativity, the basis of all prosperity and progress, is fully lively in the unified field. When the unified field is enlivened in national consciousness, infinite creativity is lively in the national economy, business and industry are free from problems, and prosperity is crowned with fulfillment.

Agriculture

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

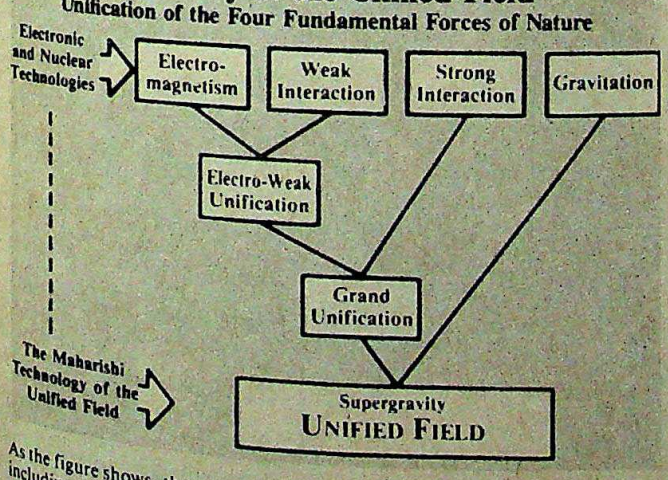
Maharishi's unified field based approach to agriculture creates perfect balance in nature. All the laws of nature rise to support the soil, the seed, the weather, and the farmer. Seasons come on time. Crops are abundant. National self-sufficiency is the harvest of unified field based agriculture.

UNIFIED FIELD BASED LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Beginning on January 12, 1984, unified field based leadership training courses will be offered in Washington, D.C. Weekend and week-long conferences will be available for the top level of leadership in all major areas of society. Other courses of varying duration will be held for administrators and future leaders.

Discovery of the Unified Field

Unification of the Four Fundamental Forces of Nature



As the figure shows, the unified field is basic to all other levels of natural law, including the electronic and nuclear levels. Therefore, identification with the unified field brings the advantage of the infinite creativity and organizing power of all the laws of nature to any individual and any nation.

Qualities of the Unified Field

Since the unified field is a field of all possibilities, the qualities of the unified field are innumerable. A few of its characteristic qualities are described here in the light of the supergravity theory of quantum physics in order to give a glimpse of the benefits that the technology of the unified field can bring to individual and collective life:

1. **Perfect Balance**—supersymmetry: balance of bose and fermi fields.
2. **Invincibility**—though the physical particle states appear broken, the Lagrangian of the unified field remains eternally supersymmetric—the laws governing the unified field are inviolable.
3. **Self-referral**—the non-Abelian property of self-interaction.
4. **Self-sufficiency**—a unified gauge field, containing the whole of physics, interacts with itself alone.
5. **Infinite Creativity**—the fountainhead of natural law: from this unified source, sequential dynamical symmetry breaking gives rise to all the particles and forces of nature.
6. **Infinite Dynamism**—the quantum fluctuations at the Planck scale express infinite dynamism.
7. **Infinite Organizing Power**—the Hamiltonian of the unified field governs the time evolution of the entire universe.
8. **All Possibilities**—all the fundamental quantum fields are fully enlivened as dynamical degrees of freedom at the Planck scale of superunification.
9. **Immortality**—time translational invariance of the Lagrangian density of the unified field.
10. **Nourishing**—the eternal continuum of the self-interaction of the unified field sustains the time evolution of the universe.

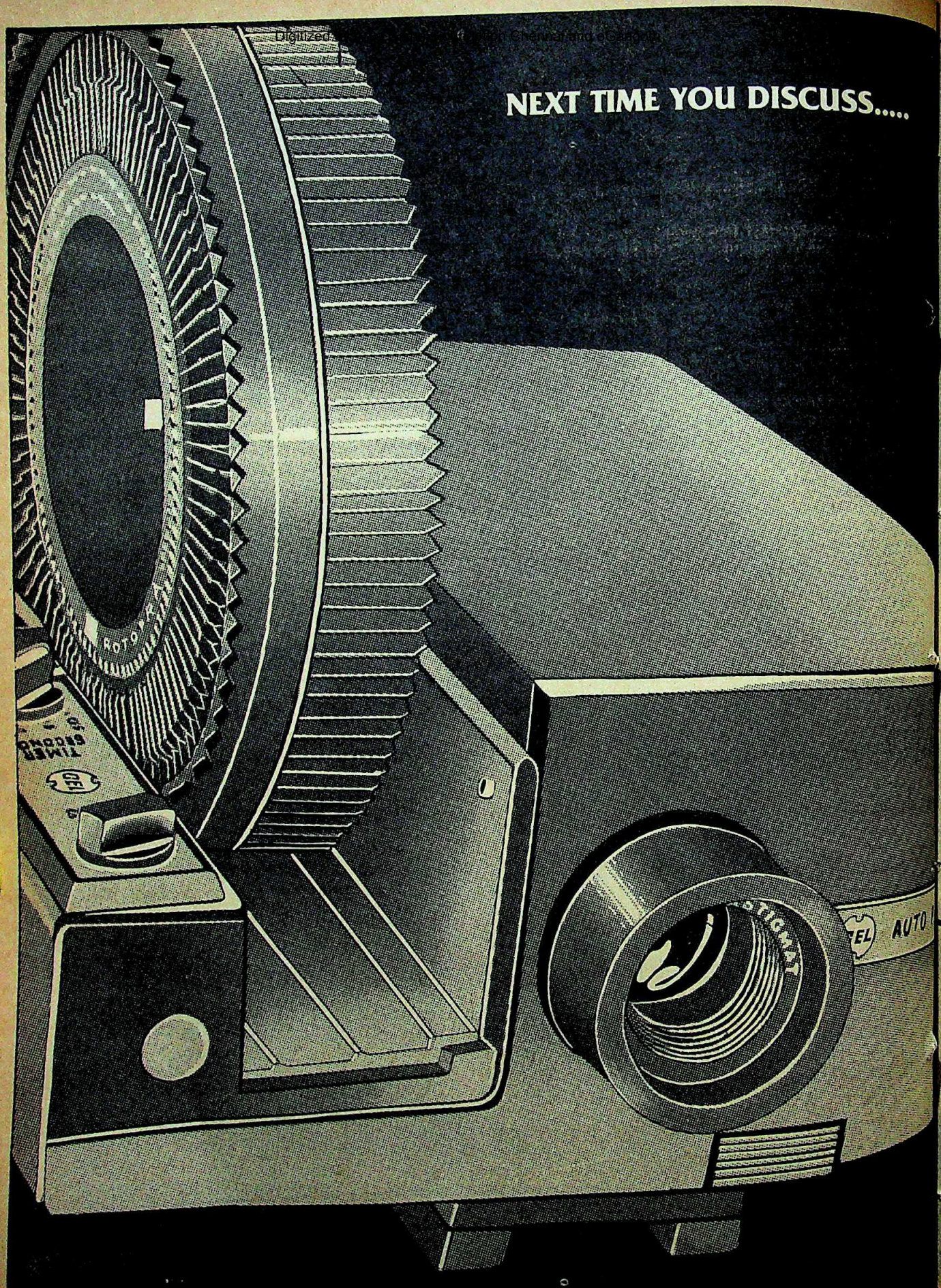
All beautiful, evolutionary qualities spontaneously blossom in individual and collective life as the mind gains increasing familiarity with the unified field. This has been amply verified by extensive scientific research in the areas of physiology, psychology, sociology, and ecology and demonstrated in the lives of millions of people and in the improving quality of national life on all continents during the past 25 years. These achievements are at the basis of our global initiative to give a sweet taste of utopia to all mankind and to invite our family of nations to collectively create unified field based ideal civilization in our generation.

The sweet taste of utopia comes as the supreme gift of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Maharishi's worldwide Transcendental Meditation movement, 1958 to 1983. Maharishi declared 1983 to be the "Year of the Unified Field." Now, 1984 will be welcomed as the "Year of Unified Field Based Civilization."

INSTITUTE OF WORLD LEADERSHIP, MAHARISHI INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY, FAIRFIELD, IOWA 52556, USA

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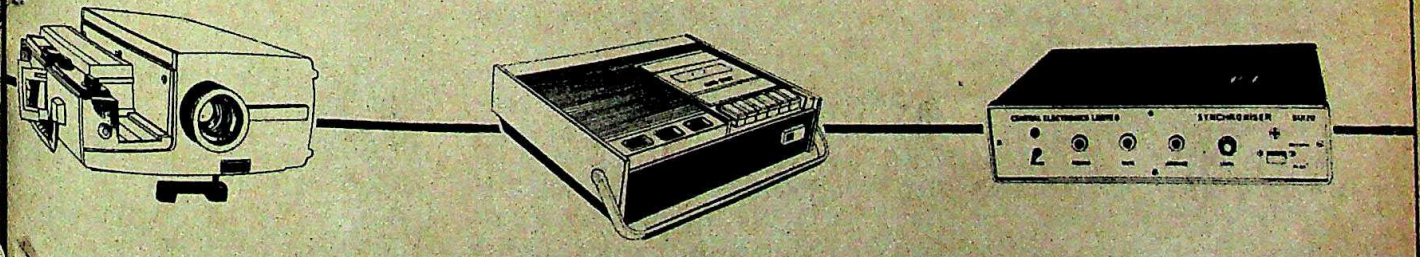
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Making sense of science

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MADHYA PRADESH

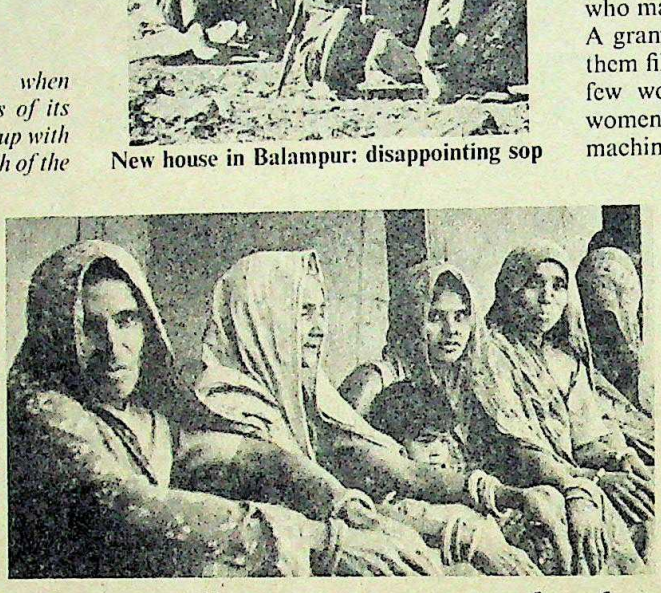
Jubilee Flops

ON NOVEMBER 1, 1981, when Madhya Pradesh completed 25 years of its existence, the state Government came up with a scheme to mark this milestone. In each of the state's 45 districts, a backward village with a substantial Harijan and tribal population would be adopted for intensive development. It would be a demonstration of what existing government schemes could do to change—and better—rural life.

Twenty-six months later, what is the progress? Bhopal Correspondent SREEKANT KHANDEKAR *travelled 1,100 km by road over a week and visited villages in five districts to find out. The story of these model villages is roughly the story of rural development repeated in the state's 77,000 villages: one of a deep gulf between promise and reality. His report:*



New house in Balampur: disappointing sop



A gram sewika came a year ago and made the Mahila Mandal fill up forms for a dozen sewing and wool knitting machines. Says one of the women: "We haven't heard from her since then. Nobody ever tells us anything."

BALAMPUR is probably the most celebrated village in Madhya Pradesh. Chief Minister Arjun Singh visited it more than two years ago when it was chosen Bhopal district's silver jubilee village; the state Government showed it off to President Zail Singh in early 1983. The local press regularly reports on it as it is easily accessible, only 22 km from Bhopal.

Going by a press note issued more than two years ago, heaven was round the corner for the village's 1,100 inhabitants. A health unit, a veterinary centre and gobar gas plants were promised. There would be assistance in improving agricultural practices, loans to 30 people for goats, to 50 for poultry and to 60 for cows and buffaloes. Twenty-six cottage industry units would be set up. And most importantly 50 wells with 50 electric pumps as well as nine tubewells for irrigation would be provided—all this within five years.

A vet visits the village every day now and a doctor once a week, but Balampur's most tangible gain is undoubtedly the construction of 52 huts for the homeless. But that is about all. Electricity poles stand a few yards away but the homes are unlit. Kalu Ram, who worked on their construction because he was promised one for himself, says darkly: "An investigation will show that about a dozen are occupied by people who don't belong to this village at all. But they are in because they know the landlords, and people like me are out."

Unfulfilled Promises: But that is a small disappointment compared to the one in irrigation: not one of the dozens of wells, pumps and tubewells promised has materialised so far. In 26 months only two loan applications for electric pumps have been cleared, and even these were pending from the time before the village was adopted.

Balampur provides a living contradiction to the fallacy that poverty can be banished by spraying money liberally under the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP). About 60 goats provided under the programme have died due to illness, a fact confirmed by the young local vet. Bhimji, whose goats also died, says the number is so high because the goats always were sickly.

Mahesh Kumar gets furious when the subject turns to the supply of a buffalo each to 40 beneficiaries under the IRDP. "Ever heard of a Rs 3,200-buffalo that gives a negligible trickle of milk?" he asks disgustedly. "I've got one. Yes, it is true that I was present along with officials when we bought them in Kosi (Haryana), but the whole purchase works in such a way that the *dalals* crowd you and push you into making a bad choice." The local 20-point programme committee, say villagers, is now inquiring into the widespread complaints against the poor quality of animals.

Dashed Hopes: It is close to a year since a dozen gobar gas plants were set up. They are still lying idle. Idle, like the 25 women who make up the dormant Mahila Mandal. A gram sewika came a year ago and made them fill up forms for a dozen sewing and a few wool knitting machines. One of the women who has applied for a wool knitting machine hasn't so much as seen one, but she asked for one because the gram sewika told her to. Says another: "It is many months since she took the forms. We haven't heard from her since then. Nobody tells us what is happening." Says a village summing up two years' experience: "It is like being adopted only to become an orphan soon again."

If Balampur's promixity to the capital doesn't seem to have stood it in good stead, it's hard to surprising that further away things are still more dismal. Khamariya, 115 km from the district headquarters of Raisen district, and it takes a jeep nearly three hours to travel the last 35 km. The list of achievements at the silver jubilee village is short. "I hope you have noted that we installed two hand-pumps in Khamariya," says a district official in Raisen. "I hope you have noted that last year we held adult literacy classes." They don't appear to have done much good in Khamariya, inhabited by 250 tribals and Harijans, nobody knows what a newspaper, let alone a reporter is. Villagers haven't seen



Incomplete community centre at Khamariya

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one and find it hard to comprehend when it's described to them.

Disappointments: Electricity did come to Khamariya about a year ago and now 15 houses have connections, but recently it went off abruptly for four months. There are seven electricity poles too, but none fulfil their function. But on the credit side, there is now a two-room school building, whereas earlier classes were held out in the open.

"We are terribly disappointed," says Prahlad Singh. "We had been told of so much but so little has happened. The road to Begumganj (35 km away) would be fixed, we were promised. But we continue to be cut off from the world four months in a year." Another villager adds that there are no irrigation facilities and that loan applications for electric pumps—the village has only one—are still pending, after months.



Fazal Ahmed: "Nothing has been done"



PHOTOGRAPHS BY SRI I KANT

The paving of the road is incomplete, with two-thirds of the village still to be covered. Even in the winter, the narrow streets are dirty, and during the rains, says Hariprasad Shrivastava, the panchayat secretary, the slush is terrible.

KHAMARIYA presents a classic example of the attitude of superiority that government officials bear in dealing with villagers; a neo-colonial attitude of we-know-what-is-good-for-you that has never done anyone any good. Few explanations are given by officials and few are sought by the villagers. The gulf between ruler and ruled is wide, and the lack of dialogue total. It is easy to see why villagers are so alienated from the process of their own development.

A community centre lies incomplete and, says Prahlad Singh, no work has been done on it for several months. Prahlad is among the better-off in Khamariya but even he has no idea of what purpose the centre will serve: "I'm sure it will be useful but nobody has told us specifically why it is being built."

More than a year ago, officials gave 550 chickens to 20 villagers to start a small poultry movement. But the beneficiaries were not educated on how to care for the fragile birds, there was no follow-up, and now nearly all of them are dead. Many have succumbed to disease, others have been taken by predatory birds and animals. Narayan Singh, a young boy, has lost all his chickens: "We never asked for them but these officials told us to fill in forms and so I did. I never wanted them but took them only because they were free." He shrugs and adds, "Anyway, now they are all gone."

Unsatisfactory Gifts: Or take the case of an agricultural labourer, Kamodh Singh. Says he: "I wanted a bull but the sahib said why do you want one if you don't have land? I told him if I had one, I could cultivate landowners' fields (under the system of share-cropping). He turned that down and said that I would be given goats. But I don't want goats. What should I do?"

Some adopted villages are marginally luckier. Some Rs 2.5 lakh has been spent in Siddiqganj, 76 km from Sehore, on a waiting room for bus travellers, a building for a panchayat, two school buildings, a dozen houses and the paving of almost one kilometre of village paths. But if it is to be a model village, much more obviously needs to be done. "Work has ground to a halt after the panchayat elections six months ago," says sarpanch Fazal Ahmed, a mild mannered man. "Since I took over, absolutely nothing has been done." Ahmed says that one rather serious problem is a stream some kilometres away which cuts the village off in the rains. "We've got Rs 50,000 from the collector's fund," he says, "but I suspect that since this isn't enough and the Public Works Department has no money to spare, the bridge will remain incomplete." Also incomplete is the paving, with two-thirds of the village still to be covered. Even in the winters, the narrow streets are dirty and during the rains, says Hari Prasad Shrivastava, the panchayat secretary, the slush is terrible.

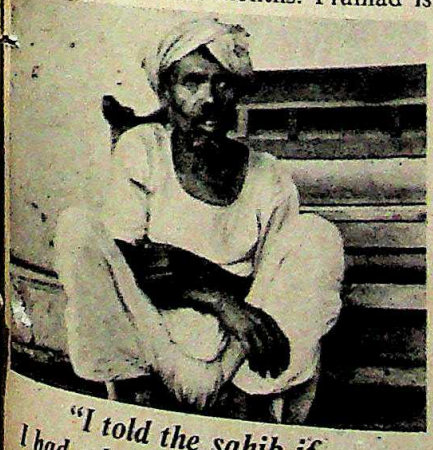
Siddiqganj has a mini-primary health centre but the nearest doctor is available at Ashta, 33 km away. Says Ahmed: "It is common for people to die on the way to hospital. A government doctor is supposed to come twice a week but there are times when he doesn't appear for weeks."

A government booklet says that five biogas plants are to be set up of which work on two has already started. But in reality, nothing has even commenced so far. Shrivastava says that 92 people have so far applied for loans under IRDP but only about 20 have actually got them. Most of the applications have been pending and unheard for two years now.

Follow-up Action: "These schemes of giving goats and poultry and buffaloes will never change the situation," says Devbaksh Solanki, a Harijan and the village up-sarpanch. "What we need is cottage industry and we wish someone would help train us, someone who knows these things."

Some attempts have been made but as usual there has been no follow-up action. Three young boys were taught motor winding but they have not been given loans and so their recently acquired skills are wasting away. Similarly, 30 women were trained in using the charkha over three months but since then there has been no action, and so the women continue to sit at home.

Ahmed points out that many of the more important promises have yet to be fulfilled. Apart from the bridge and improvement in the road—a bone-rattling 12-km stretch that links it to the main road—the



"I told the sahib if I had a bull, I could cultivate land-owners' fields. He turned that down and said I would be given goats. But I dont want goats. What should I do?"

—Kamodh Singh

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construction of a building for the high school, upgrading of the existing water supply scheme, and the establishment of a primary health centre remains either unbuilt or incomplete. "But when will work start again?" he wonders, "When will it be completed?" "Surely, before the state celebrates its golden jubilee," laughs a villager in reply.

AT CHEERKHEDA, 16 km from the district town of Vidisha, the claims come fast and thick. "A lot has been accomplished," says Raghunath Rao, a dark, lean man who was sarpanch of Cheerkheda until a few weeks ago. He points out that a veterinary clinic has been set up, a balwadi bhavan constructed, 48 one-room houses have been made for the poor, and most significantly, there is now a piped water supply system in the village which works perfectly well. He admits, though, that very little has been done for irrigation: electricity came to Cheerkheda a decade ago, but it is restricted to the village proper and lines have not been drawn to pumps in the fields.

The rural social structure does not permit people to contradict lightly the words of a former sarpanch. Initially, villagers are reluctant to go against anything Rao has said, but resentment is present and once the grumbling starts, it is apparent that they view him as the villain of the piece.

The water scheme cost the Government Rs 3.50 lakh but there is none of the expected gratitude. "We were better off earlier," says Bhamarji, an elderly man. "People have lost good money and there is no water." "Yes," affirms young Takhat Singh, "the taps are stone dry and there hasn't been a drop for months." A crowd of villagers demonstrates one tap after another, pointing to the dry soil beneath each tap to prove the argument.

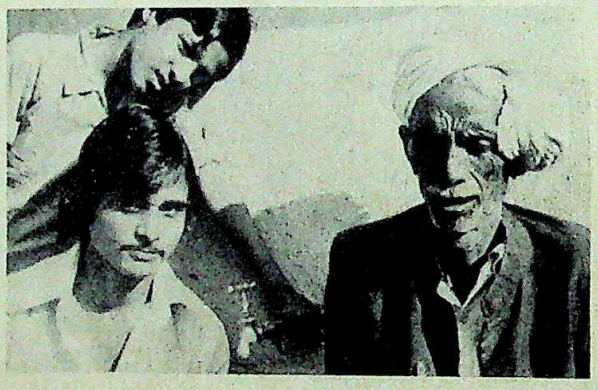
Grave Charges: They allege that Rs 200 was collected from each of the 40 families which wanted house connections and that no receipts were given. Now that there isn't any water, they would rather have their money back. "But there are no receipts," says Kripa Ram, "so whom can people approach for their hard-earned money?"

Kamal Singh says that of the 48 one-room units made for the poor, only 12 are occupied by those for whom they are meant. Thirty-six continue to be unoccupied one year after they were constructed, all of them are in the possession of Cheerkheda's landlords. Says a Harijan occupant: "Rao sahib himself has kept two rooms for his own use."

Losers in the process have been people like Sakur, a Gond who lives in a broken-down hut with his wife and childern. He says: "My plea for a house was turned down. I couldn't argue with that. Then I asked if at least some wood could be arranged for me so that I could fix my own hut. Even that request fell on deaf ears." Meanwhile, the administration crows about the houses provided to the homeless.



"My plea for a house was turned down. I couldn't argue with that. Then I asked if at least some wood could be arranged for me so that I could fix my own hut. Even that request fell on deaf ears."
—Sakur



No water: Cheerkheda villagers by a dry tap



A sum of Rs 40,000 has been sanctioned for a balwadi, but one and a half years after the foundation stone was laid, construction has just begun.

Disastrous Schemes: The housing scheme in Hoshangabad district's village Pipaliya Kalan too has been a disaster. A sum of Rs 30,000 went into constructing 12 houses, but standing over their ruins, says former sarpanch Rajendra Prasad: "No one ever occupied them." The village has a population of 1,450, split up into the main settlement and three hamlets, inhabited by Korku tribals. Raghuvanshis, the dominant community, own 80 per cent of the land.

Pipaliya Kalan has about 30 children in a school up to class eight and students come from 10 neighbouring villages. Now the Department of Tribal Welfare has put Rs 20,000 for a primary school building which caters to 15 tribal children. A primary school for girls was also started eight months ago: it has 22 students but neither a building nor a teacher. Again, up to Rs 40,000 have been sanctioned for a balwadi but one and a half years after the foundation-stone was laid, construction has just begun.

Electricity has come and 9 houses have connections, but according to Rajendra Prasad, only half of 45 lamppost actually work. Building of pavements and drains was taken up but it has been left incomplete. Villagers are particularly anxious about two canals which have been made to link the fields with an irrigation project nearby and which will irrigate about 400 acres but, everyone is uncertain about when the water will actually flow.

Widespread Pessimism: Health consti tutes a major problem, for there are no facili ties. A doctor from the tehsil town of Sehore, Malwa, used to visit every week, but he stop ped coming, saying that he had not bee given a quota of medicines for the villa

Optimism is clearly lacking in t hamlet of Badipura, 1.5 km from the m village. Mandulal, a voluble former pan complains: "The tribal population has b forgotten. All they have done in two yea to install two hand-pumps and one scho We have neither electricity, medical help irrigation. No official even visits our hab or asks us about our problems. We have pected so much more." For him as for m others, heaven will have to wait.

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Come, watch a white wonderland.

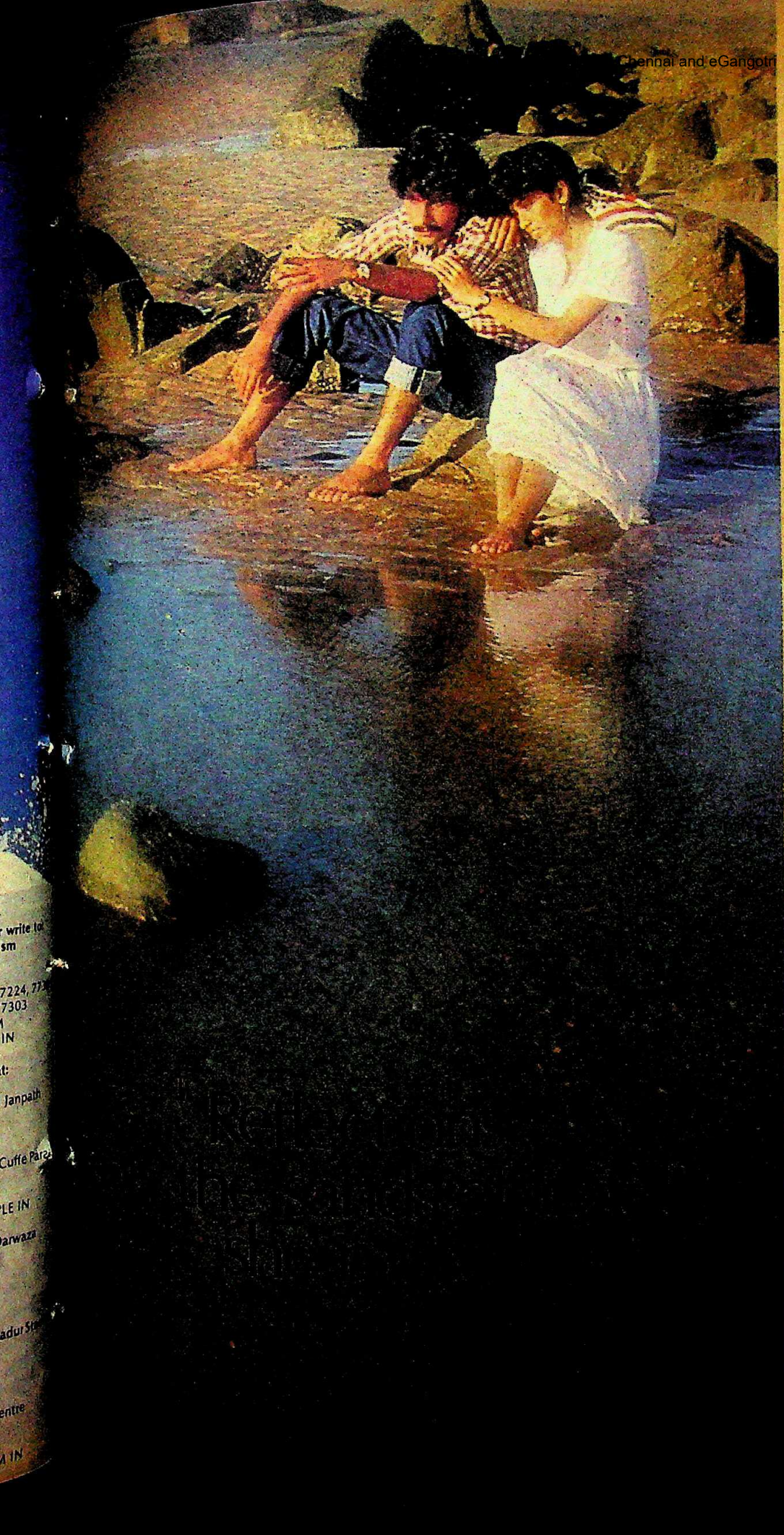
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a little time to relax.
And unwind" he said.

"Except for an HQ" she said
with a laugh, "No winding.
And no unwinding either!"

"Well that's a watch
that wins every time"
he said admiringly,
"Why, look at your watch.
Even the styling
is up to the minute!"

"Up to this second,
I didn't notice
you noticed my new HQ!"
she exclaimed.

"Despite the fact
that you've been talking
with your hands for days?"
he teased.

"Perhaps now that you've got
a watch that keeps
perfect time " he continued,
"you'll find it's time
to take the cue too!"

"They say time and tide
wait for no man"
he continued, half-seriously.

"Fortunately they don't say
anything like that
about a woman!" she said.
Getting the last word,
as usual.

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GULF AIR

Spread your wings

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ALL THAT GLITTERS...

THE INDIAN Government's bid to break out of the stranglehold of world-wide diamond monopolists de Beers—owned by a South African billionaire Oppenheimer, and its associate Diamond Trading Corporation (DTC)—has come a cropper. In 1980 when diamond producing countries like Zaire, Australia and the USSR were attempting to free themselves from DTC's absolute control, the Government decided to join the movement and set up a separate diamond buying division in the Minerals and Metals Trading Corporation (MMTC) in a bid to obtain rough stones directly from producing countries rather than through DTC.

But the subsequent crash in diamond prices has sent Australia and Russia scurrying back to DTC's fold, and India's bid at independence seems to have been equally unsuccessful. In three years the country—which has emerged as the world's largest processor of rough diamonds—struck only one independent deal with Ghana, and that for rough diamonds worth a measly Rs 40 lakh out of annual rough imports in the region of Rs 650 crore. Deals with Australia and other countries fell through, though the MMTC's diamond wing is reportedly about to strike direct import deals with Liberia and Guinea, two small producers of diamonds.

FOREIGN LABELS

FOREIGN brand names are stealing back into India at a rate which is making a mockery of the Government's policy to discourage them and oft-repeated statements that it would not permit them to show up in the Indian market-place. Despite at least seven separate denials on the floor of Parliament in the last 12 months—two of them as late as last month—December saw the entry of two more foreign brands for products made by Indian companies. The launch of Rothmans cigarettes by Duncans Agro threatens a war of foreign brands and was followed by Hindustan Milkfoods Manufacturers with the Marmite sandwich spread. These two came close on the heels of Vespa scooters by Lohia Machines and Yamaha by Escorts.

Foreign brand names clearly make it easier to gain product acceptance even though such acts as the Trade and Merchandise Marks Act of 1958 and the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act of 1973 forbid/restrict the use of such trade marks. Yet other foreign brand names are queueing up for entry into the Indian market. Ovaltine was banned months ago and replaced by Maltova, but now appears to be all set to make a comeback. Kothari Sugars has permission to market the sugar-citrus concentrate Tang and more foreign brands are seeking entry into both cigarettes and two wheelers.

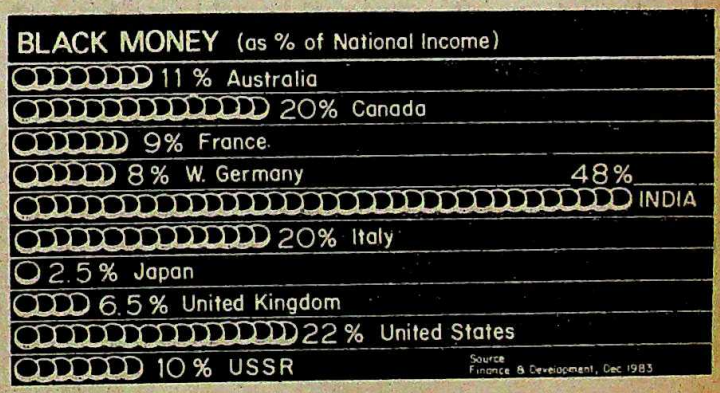
PAYING BACK PAUL

ROUND two of the Escorts-Caparo slugging contest has begun. Rebounding rapidly from his latest reverse at the hands of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), which declared that non-resident investing companies and their wholly-owned subsidiaries would be treated as separate entities for the purpose of the one per cent ceiling restrictions on investments, Escorts Chairman H.P. Nanda last fortnight filed a suit in the Bombay High Court challenging the validity of the RBI and the Government notifications on the subject. Admitted in vacation court by Justice Parikh, the writ petition will be heard for interim relief on January 18.

In court Nanda will argue that the RBI's September 19, 1983 notification on wholly-owned subsidiaries—investments in Escorts have been made by Swraj Paul's Caparo industries and 12 wholly-owned subsidiaries each of whom individually is under the one per cent investment ceiling but jointly far above it—makes a mockery of the investment ceiling imposed by the Government itself. Coming on the heels of Nanda's recent attempt to dilute Paul's Escorts holdings by the proposed issue of Rs 35-crore convertible debentures, the writ petition makes it clear that the self-made engineering tycoon will not give in to Paul's marauding intentions without a scrap.

BLACK STATISTICS

HOW MUCH black money is there in India? According to an official of the International Monetary Fund, India leads the world with an estimated black income of 48 per cent of national income (in 1978-79), more than twice the percentage in the United States (22 per cent), Italy (20 per cent) and Canada (20 per cent). Even Soviet Russia is apparently affected (10 per cent), but Japan



and Switzerland are largely untouched (3 to 4 per cent). However, the figures are not precise estimates and according to some experts, the Indian figure may be overestimated by as much as 100 per cent. But there is no doubt that black money as a percentage national income is increasing rapidly and may now be double what it was ten years ago, whatever the actual quantity.

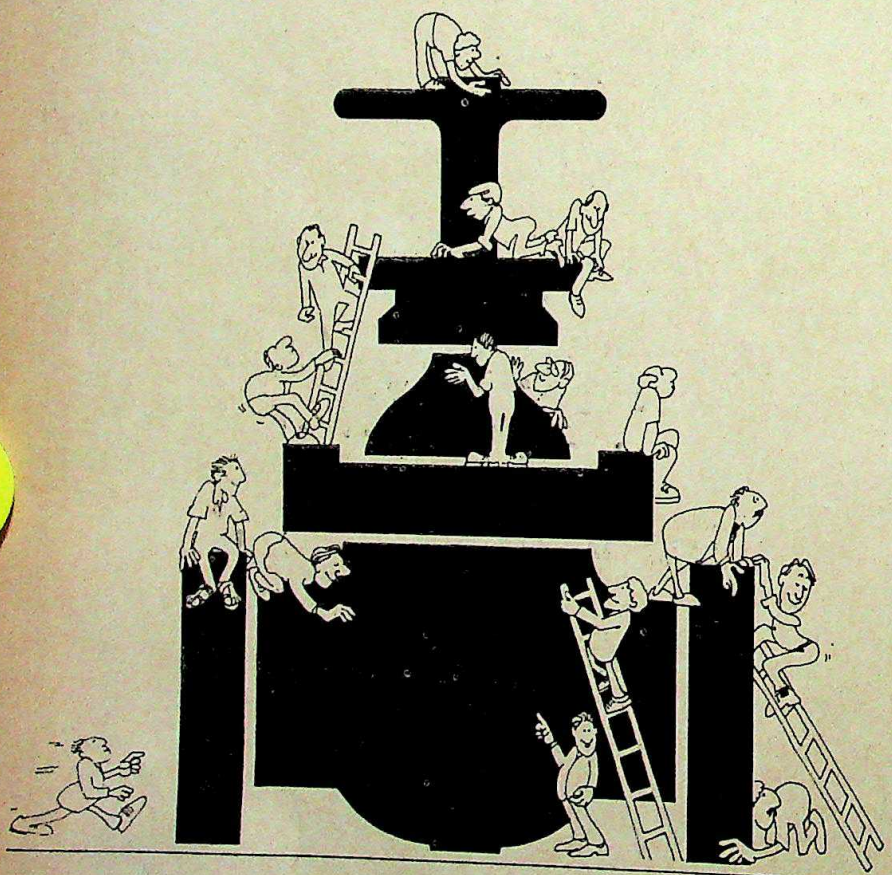
MEMBERS ONLY

AFTER years of stalling the issue of member-verification to weed out bogus members, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) has finally decided to speed up action on this front. Egged on by the multi-pronged criticism of election-rigging and unrepresentative leadership particularly from expatriate businessman Swraj Paul and Indian small-scale manufacturers who believe that FICCI serves only the interest of a handful of very large industrial groups, the powerful organisation disclosed last fortnight that a subcommittee set up at FICCI's 1981 Calcutta meet would finally submit its recommendations for removing bogus members by March 1984. But judging by the organisation's long record of membership rigging and the stranglehold of a few industrial groups on its affairs it is unlikely that even the present move will be anything more than an eyewash.

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INDUSTRIALISATION

Descent Into Mediocrity



I AM SORRY to have to start the new year with a piece of bad news, but there it is: we are not the 10th largest industrial country in the world, not even the 15th. We may be somewhere near the 20th, possibly nearer No. 25 than No. 20. And with so many other countries trying to push ahead of us, we may soon be pushed down to No. 30, somewhere between Nigeria and Turkey, not exactly great industrial powers. This may happen sooner than we think, probably by 1990, if not earlier.

International ranking is always a tricky business and may often be misleading. But when a country slips down from No. 10 to No. 20 in less than 20 years, even if the ranks are not exact, there is something wrong somewhere. There is, however, incontrovertible evidence that we have gone down in the world, or, which is the same thing, others have gone up, and unless we sit up and do something about it, we may be left far behind and thrown out of the race altogether by the end of the century.

Going by the World Bank's figures, we were indeed No. 10 in 1960 with a gross industrial product of just under Rs 6,000 crore. By 1981, this had increased to Rs 37,000 crore, a sixfold rise that sounds reasonably satisfactory, even allowing for inflation. But as many as eight countries, including Argentina, Spain, Brazil and Mexico, have done better than we have over the last 20 years and pushed India down to No. 18. In addition, there are countries like Switzerland, Sweden, Belgium and Indonesia whose gross industrial product is only marginally lower than ours and may have overtaken us by now. There are also industrial countries like Yugoslavia, South Korea and Austria that are not far behind and pushing so hard that they will almost certainly overtake us in another five years or so.

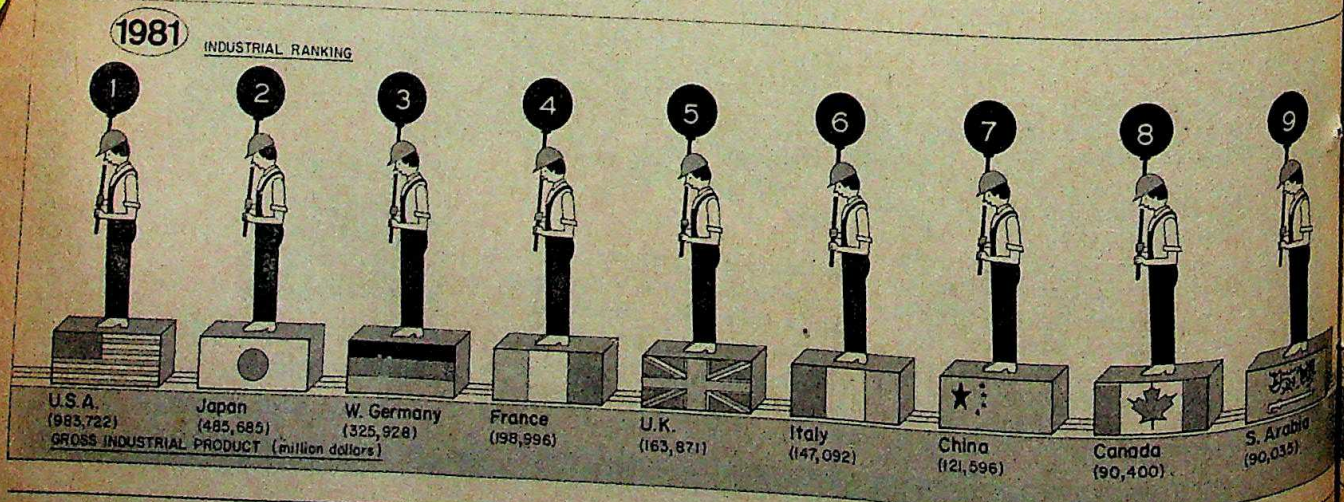
Changing Positions: In economic jargon, industry also includes mining—which explains why oil-rich countries like Saudi Arabia and Indonesia are so far ahead of us—but even if we exclude mining and consider only manufacturing which is supposed to be the most dynamic part of the industrial sector, our position is none too good. According to the World Bank, India also ranked No. 10 in manufacturing in 1960, just behind China and Australia, but well ahead of Spain, Brazil and Mexico. But by 1981, we were pushed back to No. 15, with Brazil jumping ahead of the queue to No. 7 and Spain to No. 9.

But this is not all. The World Bank is rather coy about communist countries—it calls them East European non-market countries—though it wasn't so five years ago when it did give their per capita incomes and other figures. On this basis, it would appear that at least four East European countries are ahead of us in the industrial race, namely Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and, of course, Soviet Russia, and at least three of them in manufacturing. If the communist countries are included, and there is no reason to exclude them, India is pushed down further from its perch at No. 18, maybe to 22 or 23. So, no matter how you interpret the figures, India's international position as an industrial power is not what it used to be and the country is certainly no more among the top 20 industrial countries of the world.

World Leaders: The United States has been and continues to be very much No. 1, with a gross industrial product (which is not the same as gross industrial output but related to it) touching a trillion dollars or 7 times India's national income. It is followed by Japan which used to be No. 5 in 1960, and then by West Germany which was No. 2 that year. If we include Communist countries Soviet Russia would be No 2, but some experts maintain that Japan has already shot ahead of Soviet Russia, and in 10 years from now may shoot ahead of the United States also.

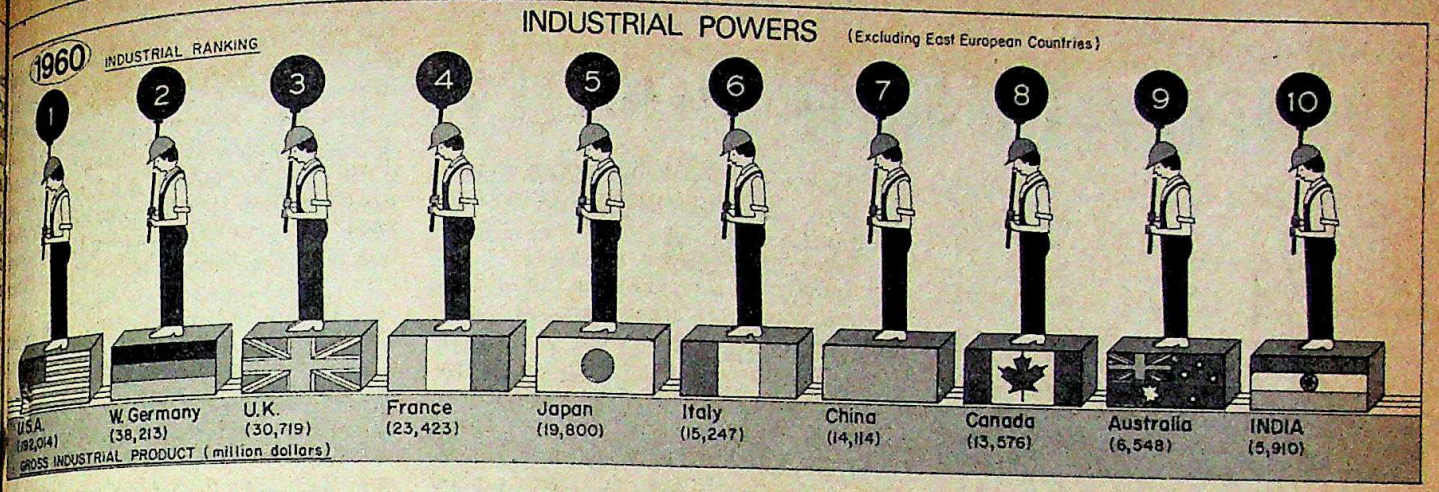
The decline in India's industrial power—not in absolute terms but in relation to other countries—is reflected in many things including exports. In 1938, that is, before Independence, and, in fact, a year before World War II, India's share in world exports was 2.9 per cent, quite a substantial chunk, considering that it was made up of such commodities as tea, and jute and cotton textiles. It came down to 2.6 per cent in 1948 and has been steadily sliding down, year after year, to 1.5 per cent in 1955, 1 per cent in 1965, 0.5 per cent in 1975 and 0.4 per cent in 1981. At this rate, exports may amount to no more than 0.1 per cent in 1999, if not less. We seem to be losing 0.5 per cent of world exports every 10 years.

Does it really matter to the man in the street, the kind of man who queues up for a kerosene bottle at the local ration shop and for onions at the super bazar, whether India is No. 10 or 20 or 30 in the international industrial stakes? Does he stand to gain or lose if exports go up or down? Tea prices shot up so much during the last few months that the Commerce Ministry had to step in and boost exports. Prices tumbled drastically as a result. Who gained and who lost? Brazil and Mexico, who are now occupying positions that we once did (No. 10 and No. 11) are in deep trouble with bankers and others breathing down their necks, and so are Iran and Argentina. We too have had to borrow from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other agencies but our economy, though growing slowly, seems to be on a more even keel and although we cannot boast of substan-



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triumphs, there are also no spectacular disasters. India is apparently like a 'mix' train, neither the crack Rajdhani that hurtles along at 100 km an hour past tiny stations crammed with gaping travellers, nor the slow goods train that ambles along and stops at every little station and often every little yard, while guards gossip in the afternoon sun, but something in between.

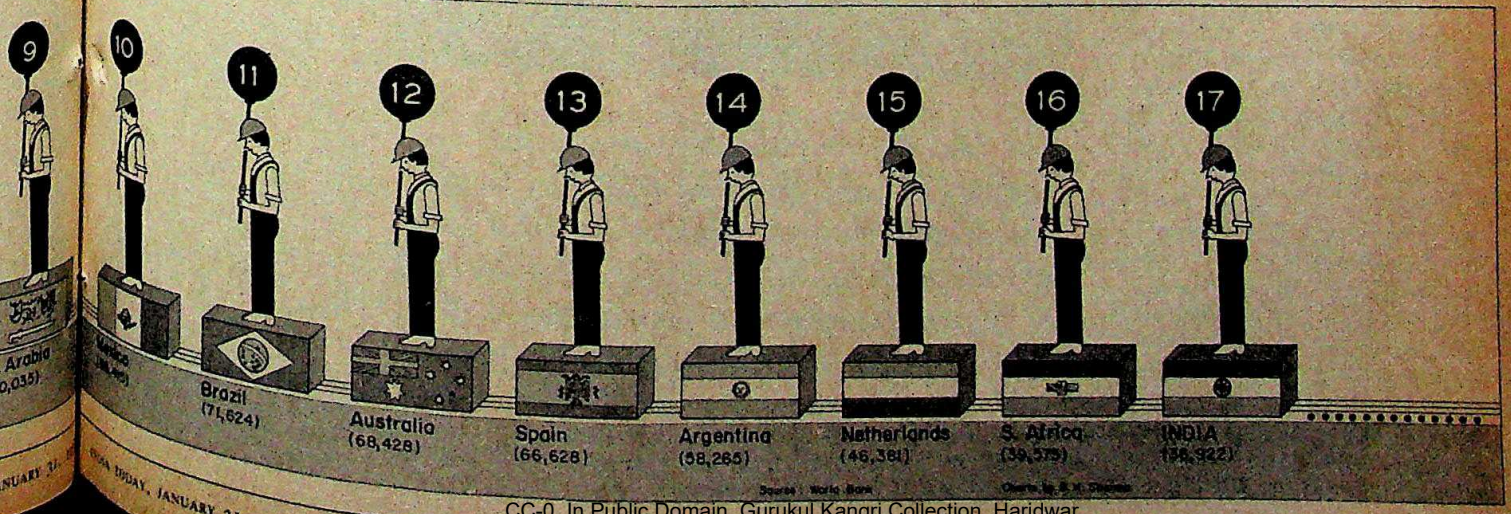
There are dangers in moving too slowly or too fast. When you move too slowly, there is just not enough money to go around and a point comes when the economic arteries harden and can work no more. This is what is happening in our villages many of which are largely untouched by the changes taking place elsewhere. Whatever changes we see in the villages are what may be called trickle-down effects of changes in cities and towns, changes brought about by modern industry and technology. Except in Punjab and Haryana, and to a certain extent in Gujarat, where rural transformation is not mainly a fall-out from industry, changes in villages are too slow and their impact too meagre and narrow. The rural sector is largely untouched by progress elsewhere and is now beginning to act as a drag on the rest of the economy.

Uneven Growth: On the other hand, when things change too fast, certain sections of the community are apt to appropriate for themselves a much larger proportion of the benefits than is legitimately due to them, unless, and this is a major proviso, the Government regulates the fall-out. This is what happened during World War II, when businessmen and traders involved in servicing defence forces became too rich, while villagers in Bengal and elsewhere starved and died in thousands. It has been estimated that industrial production during the last three years of the war exceeded the entire industrial output of the previous 20 years. Such a sudden access to wealth led to several abuses including a taste for black money which has remained with our business class—and has now spread to other classes including bureaucrats and politicians—ever since.

The sudden access to IMF funds is also apparently having the same kind of impact. From chronic shortage of foreign exchange we have moved on to too much foreign exchange, so much in fact that a good deal is being spent on extravaganzas like Asiad, NAM and CHOGM. A government that does not think twice before spending Rs 40 crore on a two-day jamboree for its guests has either more money than it can use, or has lost track of its moral perspectives. Either way, growth suffers.

Has growth suffered because of lack of resources? It is not the kind of question to which a straight answer can be found but I doubt whether lack of resources has always been a major constraint in our growth. It may have been so in the early years when nearly everything that was needed for development was and had to be imported—capital, technology, management skills etc. But we are today neither short of capital nor technology nor, indeed, management skills, which we are now actually exporting. Half our industry, a good deal of it in the public sector, would not be idle if we were short of capital. The public sector undertakings would not be making losses year after year if resources were in short supply.

I have never been very enthusiastic about loans from foreign agencies nor about non-residents, for what keeps the country down is not resources but the lack of ability to use them efficiently. As long as we do not develop this capacity, not all the dollars in Washington or the Isle of Man can arrest our slow descent into mediocrity. In fact, too much money at this stage may be positively harmful. We have had more scandals during the last three years than possibly in the last 20, for too much money, like too little, is bad for a society that doesn't know how to use it.



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VERGHESE KURIEN

Milk on the Boil

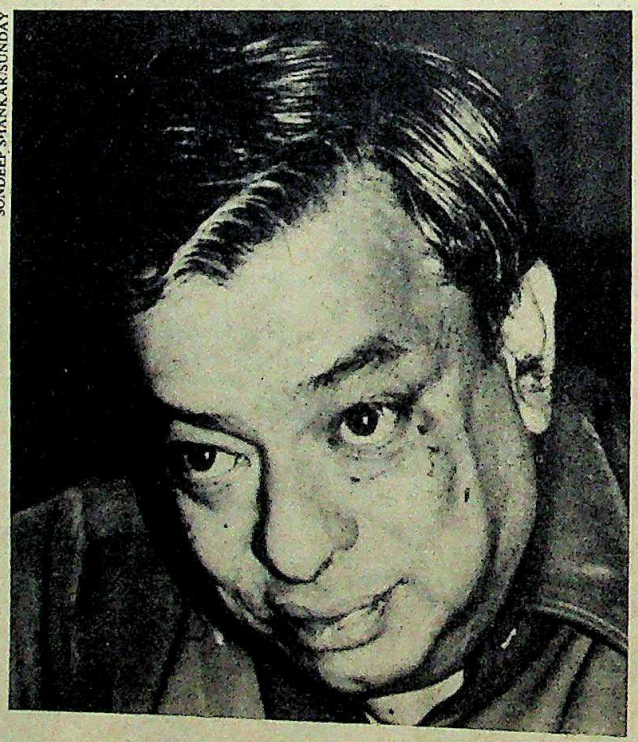
THE LAST time Verghese Kurien was in the firing line, when milk supplies to Delhi almost failed in 1981 due to low procurement in surrounding milksheds, he fielded off critical questions by bursting into tears of anguish. "Is Kurien the only cow in the country?" said the man who has in the last decade become something of a folk hero through his high-profile championing of farmers and urban consumers. "If a blade of grass does not grow in Haryana is Kurien responsible?" Loftily talking of himself in the third person, he then launched into a favourite anecdote about how Alexei Kosygin once told him he would be shot for the development work he had undertaken. The moral: that all criticism against Kurien is criticism of farmer cooperatives by industrialists and bureaucrats whose power and authority are threatened.

Last fortnight the incredible milkman of Anand was faced with some of the worst attacks yet on his credibility, the concentrated flak coming at him from magazine and newspaper articles, parliamentarians, and even some employees of his tightly-run National Dairy Development Board-Indian Dairy Corporation (NDDB/IDC) complex. His schemes are a byword with a beleaguered metropolitan citizenry which see them as phenomenally successful projects which freed consumers from the milk queues and "token-system" rationing of the past. But they were last month attacked through barbed questions in Parliament, hard-hitting press articles which called for an independent review of their failings, and the criticisms of a handful of social scientists who argued that the near-legendary "doodhwala's" Operation Flood had systematically deprived both poor rural producers and economically weaker urban consumers of access to milk.

Staying Power: But Dr Verghese Kurien, at 62, is the greatest survivor the Indian public sector has ever seen. He has successfully weathered every storm in the past, often emerging even stronger than before. Perhaps the most powerful government servant in the country —though he insists that he serves only the farmers since he accepts no wages from the Government— Kurien rode out the latest assault in characteristic style. (INDIA TODAY, January 15). In a move clearly orchestrated by his close supporters at the NDDB's Anand headquarters, 700 of the organisation's officials and 50 from IDC tendered mass resignations in protest against the attitudes of Union Agriculture Minister Rao Birendra Singh and Minister of State Yogendra Makwana.

For Kurien the latest episode was probably little more than another act in a life filled with melodramatic developments. He emerged unscathed, possibly even strengthened, with Makwana hastily back-tracking on previous statements and announcing that Operation Flood was an undiluted success, Rao Birendra Singh adding that any evaluation of the "successful" project would only be in order that its scope might be expanded.

SONDEEP SHANKAR/SUNDAY



"Is Kurien the only cow in the country?" said the man who has in the last decade become something of a folk hero through his high-profile championing of farmers and urban consumers. "If a blade of grass does not grow in Haryana is Kurien responsible?"

The reaffirmation of faith extended to urb middle class consumers whom Kurien wooed and won in the last 20 years: a stre of irate letters poured into newspaper magazine offices which had published ports critical of Flood, and by end-Dec ber it was clear that the assiduously built public image of Kurien the superman rem ned largely untarnished.

Human Dynamo: The image today i a powerfully independent force, a whirlw operator who storms impediments and molishes hurdles to gain his object Kurien is a bundle of contradictions, a plex mix of personality traits which n theless go to make up a supremely sin minded individual. A human dynamo judge by the range and massive scale of operations he handles, yet he works an ap rently relaxed eight-hour day, taking time for leisurely lunches and rarely missing stiff lunch-time or evening "double gins tonic" which are his hallmark. But close tenant and NDDB Additional Sec tary Dr Amrita Patel says actual working day begins at t every morning, when he wakes to conceptualise and map out ambitious plans he has bec famous for. An abrasive and abusive character who misses opportunity to deride the bur cracy, he has nevertheless mo faster and more effectively thro the maze of red tape than any o official in post-Independe India.

He has rubbed virtually e state Government up the wr way, but combined the clout fund-disbursement with cajo chief ministers to get what he w ted. He has consistently stressed devotion to milk producers, alw argues that his major interest is farmer and not the consumer he has been instrumental in sig cantly hiking the prices of ur milk supplies. Yet Kurien ga the undiluted adulation of mi class consumers merely by ma the once-scarce liquid availab large quantities. He is dogm and unyielding, ruthlessly down dissent or suggestions tried systematically to de labour unionists who attempte organise dairy employees. Y hand-picked managerial tea 735 is dedicated to a point w would put even corporate ma gers to shame. Scores of his are ready to spend months in most undeveloped backwater trying conditions at a word f

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man. Boasted Kurien: "I ask my men
w many times can a man die?' And they
'bonce sahib' and go into the wilds to carry
my plans."

Outstanding Qualities: Kurien—he is a
agsaysay Award winner and recipient of
Padma Bhushan—is also a force who has
propriated virtually every dairy develop-
nt function in the country, controls over
700 crore of state funds apart from the
undreds of crore rupees generated annually
state cooperative milk federations which
indirectly controls. Last October, in a
mic new gesture in a life which has the
kings of theatre, he gave up even the
rmers' wages" when he retired to make
y for a successor to manage the Gujarat
operative Milk Marketing Federation
CMMF)

But Kurien's most outstanding quality
his sheer dynamism, his unwillingness to
ke no for an answer and the ability to
eamroll opposition and push plans
rough. In just 14 years he has
ept through the country's le-
argic organised milk industry,
ted state-run processing
ants into action and added
undreds in the cooperative sec-
r, and changed the face of dai-
ing in India. Flood was an
eration which sought to eli-
ate the middleman between
lk producer and consumer,
hance milk production by
aking scientific inputs availa-
e, and flood the cities with
od quality milk. "We can't
derstand what the fuss is all
out," said NDDB Additional
cretary Amrita Patel last fort-
ght, "this campaign to vilify
peration Flood is obviously
aded by people who do not
ant the farmers to get a fair
al. Why so much excitement
er milk, how come nobody
er objected when middlemen
re exploiting producers?"

Successful Efforts: Under
peration Flood and its succes-
r Operation Flood II, he has
creased milk processing plant capacity
om five-fold from 16.55 lakh litres per
y (LLPD) to 81.9 LLPD: bulk vending booths
d plastic sachet plants in metropolises now
urn out enough liquid milk every day to
minate both rationing and, to a large ex-
nt, queues, and powder plants now produ-
100,000 tonnes of skim milk powder and
fant feed compared to a little over 20,000
nnes in 1970.

Most successful has been his effort to
ganise rural milk producers into coopera-
ves modelled on the famous Amul manu-
facturer in Gujarat's Kaira district. By October 1983 a handful of successful cooperative unions in Andhra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and dairying forerunner Gujarat had gained a membership of 21 lakh farmers who supplied over 33 lakh litres of milk per day for city consumption—though Gujarat, with almost half the farmer-members and 55 per cent of milk procurement accounted for most of the progress.

KURIEN has come a long way from the reluctant young dairy scientist who was forced to work at a government creamery in Anand some 33 years ago. Back from a government dairy scholarship in Michigan State University, he was compelled by his bond to work in Anand, and drifted into the cooperative there almost by accident. Today he is a man with a mission who believes unbendingly in the cooperative ethos, and stresses that only by eliminating the "trader-exploiter" can farmers who produce 48 per cent of the gross national product be given a fair deal.



Queuing up for milk from Mother Dairy: clouded in controversy

Explained Kurien: "Farmers are poor, and we must think of giving them a good return on their production, but we have to recognise that city incomes are skewed and consumer prices can't go too high. Therefore you must evolve a structure which will transfer to the farmer the maximum share of the consumer's rupee, and the only way to do this is to remove the exploiting structures of middlemen and traders." Accordingly expanding the ambit of his NDDB in the past six years, Kurien has launched an ambitious Rs 160 crore Operation Flood-like edible oils project and nascent programmes for marketing fruits, vegetables, fisheries and even jute.

But even as he stormed into oilseeds and the marketing of other agricultural produce, the basic Operation Flood model which he was replicating was being questioned. Initially promoted as a milk procurement and distribution project which, while solving the chronic shortages of metropolitan India, would increase rural incomes and nutrition levels nation-wide, Flood has for long been touted as the most successful dairy development effort in the world. Ironically, even as serious doubts were cast on project performance at home, news releases from Anand stated that other underdeveloped countries including neighbouring Pakistan and China were planning to emulate it. But Kurien's efforts, for all their visible successes on the urban milk distribution front, continued last fortnight to suffer from serious drawbacks and a massive gulf between promise and performance.

Drawbacks: For a project which boasts as its greatest achievement the procurement and urban distribution of milk, Operation Flood—both phases I and II—remains distressingly short of its declared goals. The original five-year phase I ending in 1975 was to increase fresh milk procurement for the four metropolitan dairies from 6.87 LLPD to 22.75 LLPD, make the dairies "self-sufficient" for their supplies, and reduce recombination of conserved milk solids from 24 per cent in 1970 to 17.27 per cent.

Recombination is undertaken in order to balance periods of scarcity and plenty: since Indian milk production is "flush" after the monsoons and "lean" in summer, the aim is to conserve winter surpluses by processing milk into skim milk powder (SMP) and butter or butter oil (BO), and recombine this into liquid milk in summer. It is also undertaken to counter national scarcity, by importing milk solids and recombining. But the aim has always been to keep this to a minimum, since nutritionally the less heat treatments and processing milk goes through, the better it is.

But although the project was extended by six years and came to an end in 1981 amidst much fanfare, procurement for the metropolitan dairies as late as 1982-83 had reached only 15.92 LLPD, recombination levels had shot up to 38.6 per cent, and self-

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sufficiency as an objective had been conveniently discarded after it became apparent that dairy imports had gone up from an annual average of 37,253 tonnes in the '60s to roughly 59,000 tonnes this year. Projections for the future made it clear that imports at this level—all gifted, but if valued at Indian prices they are worth roughly Rs 120 crore—were likely to continue.

Bad Situation: Flood II has been equally disappointing on this front. Aiming this time at supplying milk to 153 non-metropolitan towns and cities, Kurien declared in his June 1977 "preamble and summary" to the proposal for Operation Flood II that based on projections of indigenous procurement and production of conserved milk solids "recombination of approximately 10 per cent of the total liquid milk to be marketed under the programme" would take place each year. Instead, in the fifth year of the seven-year project, NDDB Secretary R.P. Jhala admitted that average recombination levels for all the milk sold around the country averaged 20 per cent, and metropolitan cities received milk which was over 38 per cent recombined.

The IDC annual Metropolitan report for 1982-83 states: "Metropolitan dairies also faced a similar situation. Their fresh milk procurement broke all previous records... Thus both rural and metropolitan dairies had the same problem this year—of disposal of milk." Yet two-fifths of the milk sold in metropolises and an indeterminate percentage in smaller cities continued to be reconstituted. Even Jhala's figures of 20 per cent recombination nation-wide is suspect. With 10 lakh litres daily in metropolitans alone recombined, even if all smaller towns sold only fresh milk—and NDDB officials admit that they did not—national recombination levels would have been upward of 27 per cent.

IN PATNA, which is touted as a major success by Kurien, two years of NDDB management gained city consumers 60.5 lakh litres of recombined milk out of a total sale of 3.17 LLPD, a staggering 61.69 per cent recombination level. Since even this is a two-year average which disguises low-procurement summer period, consumers in the city have presumably drunk milk which consisted of as little as 10-20 per cent fresh supplies at times. "We have been selling our fresh milk to Calcutta and recombining milk for local sale," admitted NDDB's senior project executive in Patna, R.K. Makrandi.

Inadequate procurement and massively increased milk processing capacities—which in turn have boosted consumer demand due to free availability of recombined imported solids—have caught Kurien in a whirlpool which he will find it difficult to pull out of. If recombination levels are brought down to the projected 10 per cent nationally, the milk shortages of the past will once more become a reality. If not, imports of SMP and BO will never come to an end.

In 1982-83 only 4,337 tonnes of SMP out of a total addition to NDDB/IDC buffer stocks of 41,909 tonnes came from domestic production, the balance being imported, and only 455 tonnes of Indian milk fat became available compared to 12,787 tonnes of import. Although Kurien stresses that domestic SMP production has gone up to 100,000 tonnes, and argues that imports would have been considerably greater but for Operation Flood and the enhanced powder-producing facilities, the point is arguable. Over half the domestic milk powder production is sold as expensive infant foods, some of the balance used in the manufacture of non-essential products like malted milk foods, and as has been proved in the first five years of the project little of the balance is made available for recombination into liquid milk. If the massively expanded city dairies are to be kept operative, therefore, large-scale imports will remain necessary.



A milk collection centre in the North-east: rapid expansion

Import Concept: Today Kurien denies that self-sufficiency was ever an aim of Operation Flood, and questions the wisdom of the concept in a world which is linked by international trade. "Is your question 'will India be self-sufficient after Operation Flood II'?" he asked last fortnight in a typical evasion of the issue. "Are you trying to say that India will have no foreign trade? If you don't import anything you cannot export. International trade means that if a country can produce a thing at a cheaper price it should be exchanged for the benefit of all others." What he ignores is that both his own preamble to the project proposal and the more detailed "memorandum on Operation Flood II for consideration by the public investment board" categorically stated that imports whether commercial or gifted would come to an end in 1985 and "the buffer stock will completely comprise of indigenously produced commodities by the last year of the project".

A major reason for the shortfalls in procurement and sharp increase in recombination levels was the diversion of Flood I funds from increasing milk production in the villages to the more visible installation of fancy processing plants, thus creating capacities without the increased milk to feed them. Instead of Rs 36.89 crore originally allocated to processing facilities, disbursements on this account were increased to Rs 74.93 crore out of a project total of Rs 116 crore, and disbursements on enhancement of milk production and the resettlement of urban cattle to rural areas at Rs 30.03 crore stood Rs 19 crore below allocation. And of this reduced figure also, the World Food Programme's "summary terminal evaluation report" stated that the "design, erection and commissioning of cattle feed plants absorbed the largest part". Since most of this cattle feed capacity was created in Gujarat, which produces only 7 per cent of the country's milk, and worked at a dismal 40 per cent of capacity, the impact on national milk production was understandably negligible.

Major Aims: Other socio-economic aims of Operation Flood were similarly given the go-by. A major aim of the project was to make cheap milk available to economically weaker sections, and the "Plan of Operations" signed by the Government of India and the UN/FAO World Food Programme on July 16, 1968 makes a clear commitment to this effect. "The Government will undertake to produce," reads the plan, "from each plant in each of the four cities double-toned homogenised milk, with 1.5 per cent fat and 9 per cent solids not fat, to meet the special needs of vulnerable groups including infants, children, expectant and nursing mothers and of the lower income sections of the population." But the plan for cheap milk has been unceremoniously dropped, Kurien has lobbied for and gained increases in milk prices for his farmer constituents, no cheap milk has been made available.

The pressures on Operation Flood, and

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the serious drawbacks in its implementation, are glossed over by Kurien in a series of evasions and misrepresentations. Last fortnight he countered charges of increased imports by stating that average annual imports in the '60s were 43,000 tonnes of SMP, whereas today they are 41,000 tonnes. But the monthly statistics of the Foreign Trade of India and Ministry of Food and Agriculture statistics for the '60s show annual average imports of 37,253 tonnes, and today in addition to SMP India receives roughly 15,000 tonnes of milkfats which were never imported in the past. Similarly, after it became known that little credit for increased national milk production could go to Operation Flood, he flatly denied last fortnight that he had ever claimed the credit for this even though virtually every public document published by the NDDB/IDC makes this claim.



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Determined Stand: Kurien is driven by a determination to prove himself the saviour of Indian dairying, and an equally strong urge to prove governmental efforts in this direction a failure. To this end he helps generate illusory profits, and arbitrarily decides on markets and SMP supplies in an effort to prove NDDB and cooperative-run plants superior to those run by the Government. The Patna dairy is a case in point. Set up under Operation Flood I and owned by the Bihar State Dairy Corporation, the plant ran deeply into the red and eventually had to close down, in part because of Kurien's refusal to buy its milk for the Calcutta Mother Dairy, which he controls.

Finally despairing of ever running it without his cooperation, the Bihar Government in 1981 invited him to take over the management. Kurien promptly began buying Patna dairy milk in Calcutta at remunerative prices, pumped in large stocks of cheap imported SMP and BO to feed to the Patna consumer, and soon after announced that it was a major success. NDDB literature tout it as a "success story" and cite increased milk throughout, cheaper milk for Patna consumers than that supplied by other Bihar dairies, and its return to profitability as their achievements.

But the figures reflect little more than artful juggling of imported milk solids. Similarly, the IDC often supplies favoured cooperatives cheap imported solids buying back more expensive domestically- produced solids from them, thus generating fictitious book profits which mean nothing.

Shortcomings: Kurien's tragedy is that his monumental ego prevents him from accepting his shortcomings. He formulates projects which profess to solve virtually every problem the nation has ever faced, loudly proclaims them to be universal panaceas which will cure every socio-economic ill in the country, and finally bends project implementation to suit strictly personal dictates once it becomes apparent that he can come nowhere near achieving his lofty goals.

And any criticism of the projects is written off as the motivated efforts of vested interests out to subvert his basic goal of making farmers self-sufficient. In a rare moment of candour last fortnight he admitted: "There may have been some social objectives I promised which were not met, never mind that, but what about (the) achievements?....And in the bargain I made enemies and created problems for myself....What you people do not know is the struggle which was there."

There is little doubt that Kurien's efforts to help farmers created enemies. In taking on powerful private sector milk suppliers and product manufacturers, and Kurien makes no bones about his intention of completely removing them from the milk procurement field, he has in all probability stirred up a hornets' nest. Against Operation Flood procurement levels of 4.4 LLPD in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh last October, private milk product manufacturers are licensed to collect 3.5 LLPD, but critics allege that they in fact mop up all surpluses and collect as much as 9 LLPD instead. In addition, the Amritsar-based liquid milk contractor and supplier Nanak Singh collects 1.5 LLPD and hordes of smaller contractors also exist.

Direct Confrontation: "I have no intention of closing them down", said Kurien, "but all milk procurement and distribution should be in farmer hands, as it is in other dairying countries, and product manufacturers must come to the cooperatives for their requirements. It is ridiculous that I should pour in crores for enhancing milk production and these people should buy up the milk with no regard for social objectives or liquid milk supply."

> ***"I don't think any consumer will disagree that it's better to have my fresh milk rather than NDDB's recombined."***
>
> —Nanak Singh

Most recently, Kurien has come in direct confrontation with Nanak Singh, the powerful Sikh milk contractor dominates Jammu & Kashmir liquid milk supplies, controls most north Indian supplies to the army, and has launched a successful fresh milk sachet in Delhi, all areas which Kurien wishes to control.

Kurien insists that it is Singh who is fuelling criticism of Operation Flood in order to discredit farmer cooperatives, adding that the milk contractor even threatened reprisals if the NDDB should enter Kashmir. Singh admits that he asked Kurien to enter Kashmir, but adds that this is not because he is scared of the competition. "My only contention is that he should not talk of destroying me," says Singh, "I started with Rs 1[illegible] and now do a Rs 40 crore business in milk, *desi* liquor, flour milling and road transport, and I don't believe anybody can destroy me except God. But the reason I suggested he keep out of Kashmir is that it has very little milk of its own, and all it will do is bring in imported powder and stale milk from Gujarat to supply to people there. I don't think any consumer will disagree that it's better to have my fresh milk rather than NDDB's recombined."

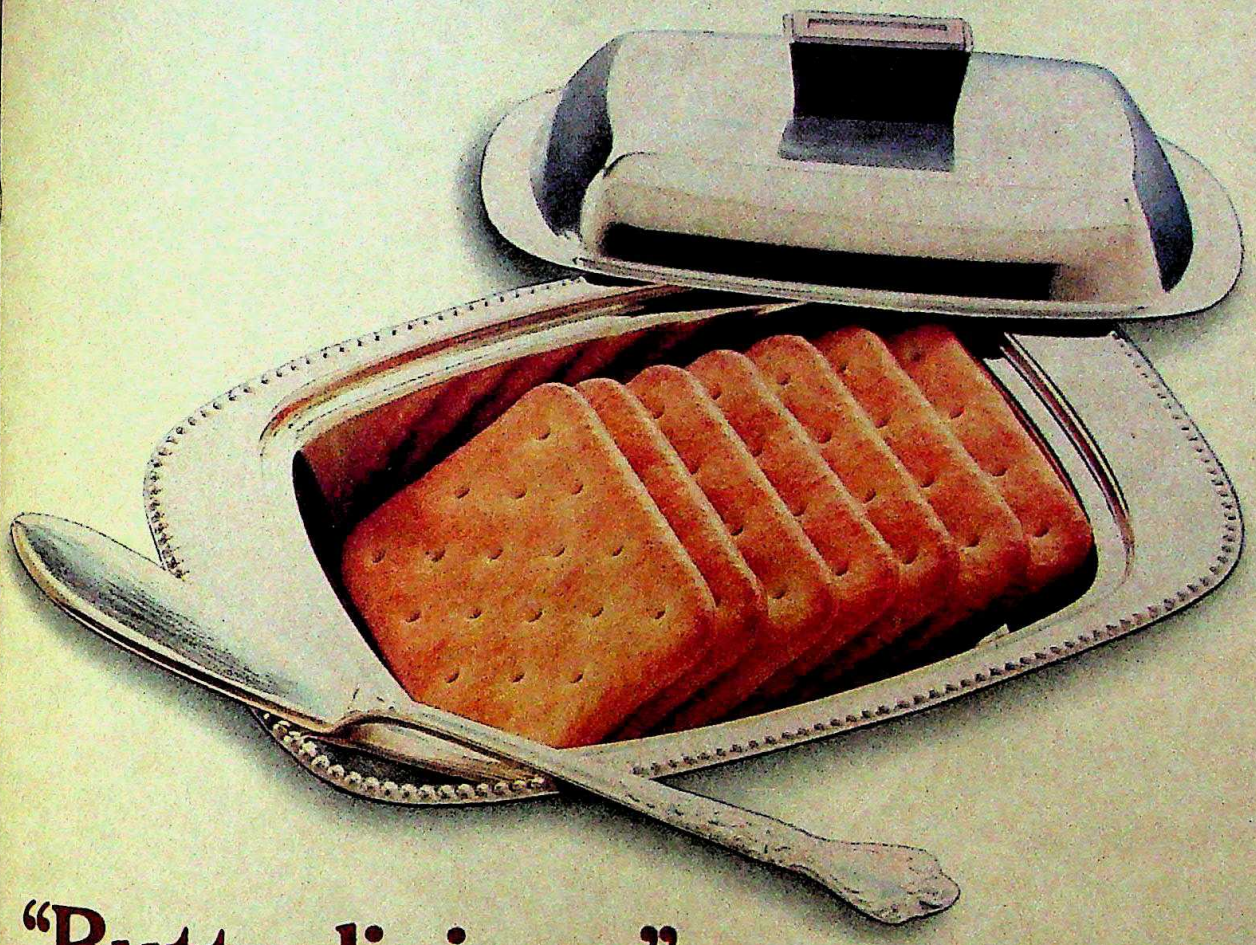
Split Personality: As if the confrontation with private sector interests were not enough, Kurien has alienated large numbers of bureaucrats whose apathy in cooperative development is glaringly shown up against the dedication of his team of go- getters. His split personality—Kurien has always faced conflict of interest between the interests of his farmer employers and the needs of powerful urban consumers for the benefit of whom many projects were formulated —and his unquestionable dedication to farmers only made things worse when dealing with unsympathetic bureaucrats.

Whatever the shortcomings of Operation Flood projects, Kurien is undoubtedly a greater motivator of men than most. His priorities are questionable, the speed of implementation of his overall project disastrous, but in mobilising farmers into the cooperative fold he has had no equal. By October last 24 lakh farmers in cooperatives around the country had joined Anand-pattern cooperatives, and theoretically at least had begun to control their own destiny. And for this massive farmer mobilisation Kurien will eventually be remembered. And his epitaph will be his favourite boast, "Kurien was a servant of the farmer, not the Government."

—CHANDER UDAY SINGH

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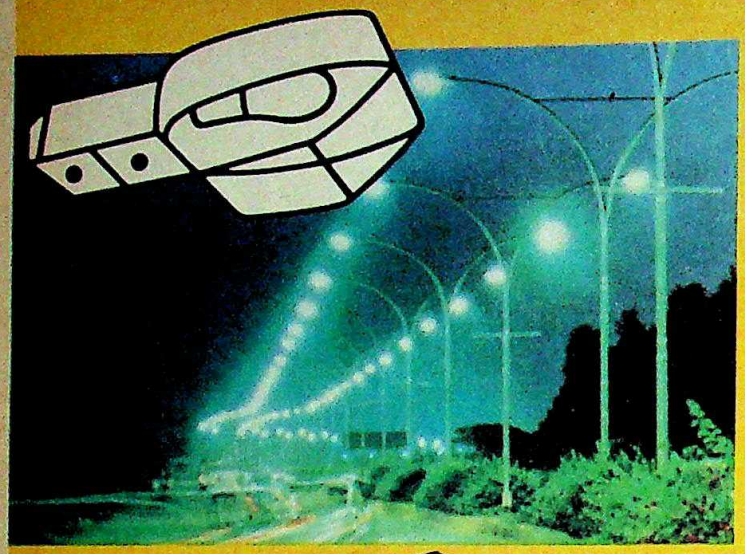
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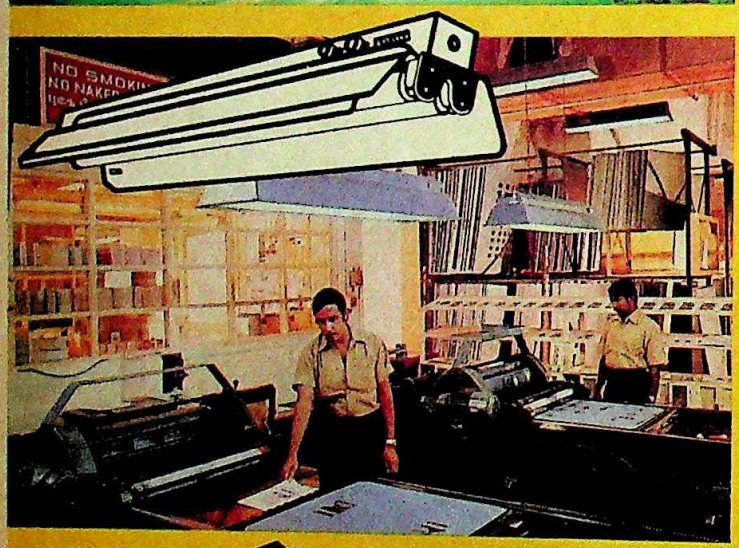
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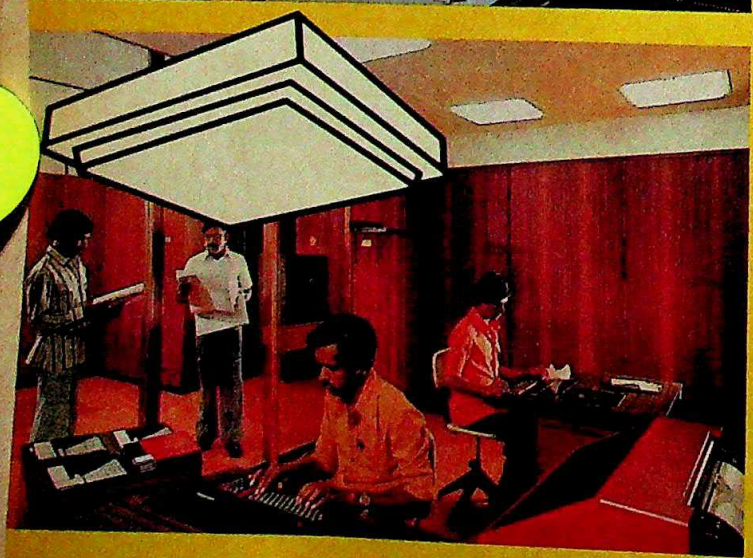
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TRAVANCORE CEMENTS

A New Shareholder

THE TAKE-OVER fever has come to Kerala too. Undaunted by the failure of ITC to gain control of Tamil Nadu's India Cements last year, Ashok Piramal of the Bombay-based Morarjee Goculdas Mills was last fortnight setting his eyes on the management of another Government-controlled unit, the Travancore Cements Limited (TCL). The Kottayam-based producer of white cement is the most profitable public company controlled by state corporations and financial institutions—its gross profit margins suggest that it is possibly the most profitable state-run company in the country and its considerable reserves and extremely low equity base made it a prime plum for any private industrialist to acquire.

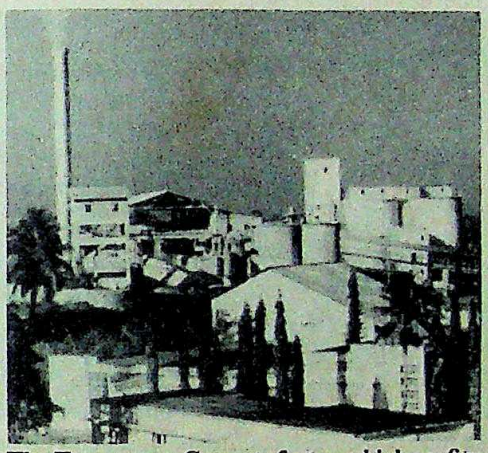
"It's a small company but with gross profits of around Rs 2.5 crore on sales of barely Rs 10 crore, its margins are very good," said Piramal, a youthful industrialist whose group has virtually doubled in the last five years with the acquisition of Bombay's Sayaji Cotton Mills, the medium-sized engineering unit S.S. Miranda, auto-ancillary company P.M. P. Auto and the setting up of a yarn texturising unit. "And since they have had very good reserves we felt that even as an investment without management control TCL would be good." He admitted, however, that his ultimate aim is at least "a share" in its management.

Good Start: Promoted jointly by the erstwhile princely state of Travancore with S.N.N. Sankara Linga Iyer and C.S. Loganathan of India Cements 37 years ago, TCL dredges Kerala's secluded Vembanad Lake for shells which are used in the production of its superior white cement, a premium product which escaped the price controls, imposed on lime stone-based pozzolana cement. But by the late 1960s cash shortages and possible mismanagement pushed the company into the red.

Sensing a major killing in the potentially profitable company, Calcutta-based industrialist, L.N. Dalmia began buying TCL shares early in the 1970s. Dalmia's earlier acquisition of the James Finlay group's Punalur Paper Mills had given him both the foothold in Kerala and the funds to buy up the cement company's undervalued shares. By 1974 his purchases from the promoter group financial institutions and the open market at the throwaway price of Rs 6 had netted him 34.9 per cent of the company's Rs 50 lakh equity, and he seemed set for a take-over.

But Achutha Menon's CPI government abruptly turned the tables on Dalmia. Stepping suddenly into the fray to protect the combined 50.13 per cent holding of various Kerala Government corporations, the Government placed its nominees in firm control, denied Dalmia even a seat on TCL's board of directors, and set the company on the road to recovery.

Outstanding Results: TCL's turnaround under government control has been spectacular. By 1978 the company showed a gross profit of Rs 48 lakh and in the years since then, this figure has multiplied sixfold. In



The Travancore Cements factory: high profits

1982 the company earned a Rs 2.26 crore gross profit on sales of roughly Rs 10 crore and 1983 profits are projected at an all-time high figure of Rs 3 crore. From the point of view of both profitability ratios and return on shareholders' equity, TCL's results have been outstanding. Corporate dividends were upped from 12 per cent in 1978 to 25 per cent in 1982, and at last count reserves stood at roughly five times its equity capital.

Piramal's entry in mid-1983 was almost a coincidence. With Punalur Papers going through a severe liquidity crisis and no prospects of a share in TCL management in sight, Dalmia asked his brokers to arrange a block transfer of the TCL holdings. Approached by his own broker who had picked up news of the sale on the corporate grapevine, Piramal promptly put through the deal at a price in the region of Rs 45 per share though the prevailing market price for TCL shares was Rs 23. Today Piramal's investment companies own 38 per cent of TCL's equity, the Kerala Government through its corporations another 50.13 per cent and the balance 11.87 per cent is widely dispersed among small shareholders.

The transferred holdings were promptly registered by TCL's management, though Piramal insists that his overtures to the company for a seat on the board have so far met with only non-committal replies. But corporate watchers in Trivandrum and Madras saw the immediate registration of Piramal's holdings as a sign of capitulation by the Government, and predicted last month that a management change-over would soon follow. Said a Trivandrum financial consultant: "The game is over. The Government of Kerala has served TCL on a platter to Piramal by registering the shares."

Charges: Arguing that Piramal's entry into the highly profitable company could have been effectively checked by a representation to the company law board before registration, detractors of the take-over attempt insisted that this was merely the first move by the Government before it completely gives in and hands the company over. But TCL Chairman and Managing Director, V. Joseph Thomas, the Government nominee who spearheaded the company's dramatic return to profitability, denied any ulterior motives in the manner of registration.

Said Thomas: "Our articles of association had not placed any fetters for share transfers. We have gone strictly according to statute." Scotching rumours that the Government had caved in due to pressure from the prominent Bombay industrialist, Kerala Industry Minister, E. Ahamed, added: "We cannot question the vendor's right to sell, our interests are well protected. There are adequate safety provisions in the Companies Act to take care of any eventualities if dominant shareholders try to destabilise the existing management."

In Bombay, meanwhile, Piramal was quick to assert that he had no intentions of fighting for control of the company. Stressing that he saw TCL as an excellent investment even without management control due to its extraordinary margins and profit potential he nevertheless insisted that his experience as an industrialist could help TCL to grow and develop. The company has been paying over two-thirds of its profits in income tax, and Piramal believes that he could help considerably in tax planning which would divert these funds towards expansion rather than making massive contributions to the exchequer. Said Piramal: "We have no intentions of fighting that's for sure, because even if we were interested in a take-over battle we could not since the Government controls 50 per cent but we are interested in contributing to the growth of the company and believe that we could do this very amicably if we were given a share in its management." Judging by the young industrialist's earlier successes which in just five years resulted in a doubling of his group's assets to Rs 57 crore, the soft words will in all probability be a mere prelude to much harder bargaining.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI and CHANDER UDAY SINGH

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VIDEO PIRACY

Villains off the Screen

FOR TWO years now, the Indian film industry has been tugging at the Government's skirts with clamorous protests against video piracy. But recently, the industry's cry for protection has assumed a desperate sense of urgency. Diminished takings at the box-office show the extent to which the nascent video technology has nibbled at the very foundations of the 60-year-old industry. Till March last year, ticket sales at the country's cinemas dropped 15 per cent over the preceding year. Says Gul Anand, film producer and distributor, grimly: "The real impact of video does not show up in a declining slide graph. It is a cumulative effect in which the roof suddenly caves in."

Anand's analogy is based on his own bitter experience as an exporter of Indian films. Since 1979, when video cassette distributors successfully urged producers to sign away their movie rights abroad, the bottom has literally dropped out of the market. Producers had naively believed that an entirely new class of audience was being created by the video. But in fact, cinema audiences were simply being replaced by video audiences.

If the impact was not clear then, because many of the contracts signed earlier hadn't been completed, it is startlingly obvious now. In the UK in 1979-80, 199 Indian films, of the export value of Rs 2.32 crore, were shown. In 1980-81, the number had dwindled to 107, although the total export value was marginally higher. But in 1982-83, a paltry 51 films were exported, and this financial year, up to November, only 23 films worth Rs 39.45 lakh have been exported. Cinema theatres showing Indian films in that country have closed shop and now serve as supermarkets and bingo parlours.

Grim Situation: Other film territories abroad have been equally badly hit: Kenya, once one of the biggest markets for Indian films, did not import a single film this year. Exports to Mauritius and West Indies are down 75 per cent, and in the Gulf by 50 per cent, with a further 25 per cent drop expected

The domestic market too, is on a decline, and in addition to the 15 per cent drop, more bad news is predicted this year by Shreeram Bohra, president of the Film Federation of India. Several big budget films flopped this year, with news of their bad ratings having spread through the video circuit even before their official release. The normal 10-week run for big movies in the major cities has petered down to four weeks.

Significantly, the effect of the video boom is felt more strongly in small towns, known in distribution parlance as C-centres, than in metropolitan cities. In provincial towns such as Narel and Karjat (Maharashtra), demands for cinema shows are down by more than 30 per cent. Under the distribution system, film prints reach there six months after the release, and thanks to the ubiquitous video, most people have already seen the film by then.



A video library does brisk business: film maker's bugbear

Government Action: At the inaugural function of the Filmotsav last fortnight, speaker after speaker protested against the video invasion. Said Raj Kapoor: "This monster is being faced by cinema all over the world and must be fought." Information Minister H.K.L. Bhagat assured the starry gathering of the Government's concern over the matter, and in fact last month it had initiated some steps. Under the Copyright Act of 1957, however, violation of copyright is a non-cognisable offence—a fact that ties the Government's hands somewhat.

Still, something was done: the Bombay Customs raided 15 video libraries and seized Rs 16 lakh worth of cassettes on the grounds that the reels were imported. Countered Manu Dadlani, secretary of the Video Cassette Club Association: "We had bills to show that our tapes had been bought in India. The problem is that tapes said to be manufactured here are actually only put together here. The mould is a foreign one, and the only difference is a paper sticker saying 'Made in India'." The raids, which took place in several other cities as well, have however jolted the flourishing video library market—affecting full-time establishments as well as hundreds of shopkeepers from panwallas to chemists who also purvey video cassettes.

But, it is really another act of the Maharashtra Government that is likely to have greater impact. It recently decided to issue an ordinance amending the Bombay Entertainment Act to include the mushrooming video parlours as well. These would require permits, against the licences for cinema theatres. The film industry sees this as the first step in regulating the myriad unauthorised establishments that have sprouted. Also, expected is a censor law making it mandatory for every cassette in the country to be cleared by the censors. But the biggest hope for the film industry is the Government's promise to reframe the Copyright Act of 1957 making any violation a cognisable offence with a possible jail sentence.

Interestingly, the video threat has served to bring representatives of the film world together as nothing else has. Says Bohra: "We are fighting with thieves who in the past have shown that they are far more organised than we are." In the past two months, the Indian Motion Picture Producers Association of India has copyrighted over 600 films. The Film Federation of India has virtually threatened to banish from its ranks anyone who sells video rights for a recent movie in the domestic market. Certainly, no major Hindi film producer dares sell even a flop film to the video companies, for fear that distributors might boycott his films in the future. For instance, producer B.R. Chopra was all set to sell his *Mazdoor* in August, only to back out under pressure from within the industry.

First signs of a confrontation are already present, with film producer V. Shantaram and the Esquire Video Company embroiled in a court case. Shantaram contends that when he signed away the world rights of some of his films, he meant rights outside India. S.C. Hira, managing director of Esquire which has bought foreign rights for 1,500 films, is quite stoic about the resistance from the film industry. He says the attitude of the film distributors today is no different from the film exporters in 1979, and acquiring domestic video rights is merely a matter of waiting. Esquire, which entered the domestic market last year, has released just 40 films, mainly old, within the country. Hira says in fact that he has secretly signed several prominent producers whom he will not name now, but adds that the Hindi film industry is in for some shocks. Bohra, in turn, accuses Hira of trying to play a war of nerves.

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Hira's point is that if the video rights are not sold legally, pirates will definitely get into the act, because of the intense demand. He claims that since last August, 2,000 distributors all over the country have approached him, eager to sign up. Video clubs are certainly doing well, and some at least, claim to be absolutely above board.

Piquant Problems: Dadlani says it is inevitable that films meant for the foreign market should find their way into the domestic market as well. "On the one hand, the Government has encouraged the import of the video cassette recorders (VCR's), and on the other, there are no cassettes to be had legally. "And similarly," he continues, "the Government has now recognised video parlours, but what cassettes can the parlour man show legally?"

Anand has no illusions about the film industry being able to withstand the onslaught of the video. "We will be able to curb it by 50 per cent (if stricter copyright laws are enforced), but some sort of mafia and piracy will remain." Anand properly sees the VCR not as a rich man's luxury, but a poor man's luxury. Already in most large slums in Bombay there are community VCR shows, and since infrastructure costs are minimal, the rates are many times cheaper than a cinema ticket. Prices of both cassettes and VCR's are expected to fall even more with the demand—a VCR costs Rs 16,000 today, but Anand expects it will fall to Rs 8,000 in the near future. Similarly, a cassette which three years ago cost Rs 100 a day to hire, can now be got for as little as Rs 5. The inevitability of the video effect notwithstanding, Anand pleads that during the transition period, at least cinema theatres and movie contracts already signed should be protected.

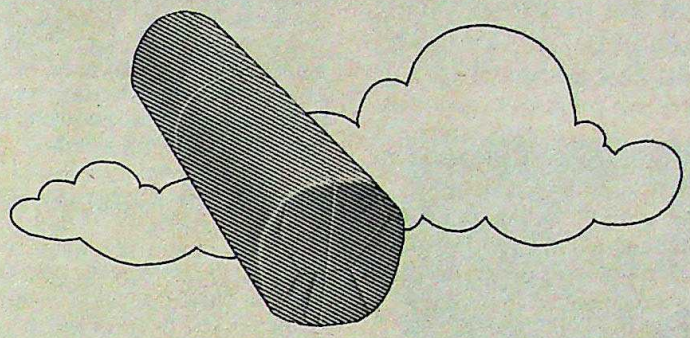
Mixed Blessing: But there are some who believe that the video might indirectly have a beneficial effect. The self-indulgent and flabby Hindi film industry, with its big star casts and unwieldly budgets, which so regularly churns out formula-ridden fare, will undoubtedly have to streamline its working and its product in order to survive. Says Hira: "It is the Hindi film producers with wasteful budgets who are running scared." On the contrary, the more disciplined south Indian producers with their modern management methods are not afraid of the video fever, claims Hira. Pointing out that only bad films are affected in any case, he claims that in the case of good small budget films like *Ardh Satya*, good publicity from the video circuit can actually increase the cinema audiences.

While only time will show what kind of an effect the video will have on the quality of films in the long run, it is obvious that for now the VCR is a reality film producers will have to live with.

—COOMI KAPOOR

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OSWAL AGRO MILLS LIMITED

Address by Mr. Abhey Oswal, Chairman, at the Fourth Annual General Meeting of the Company held on 13th December, 1983 at New Delhi.



Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure in welcoming you to the Fourth Annual General Meeting of your Company. Today, we are fortunate to have with us, a very large number of new shareholders, who have joined in our family during the year and I take this opportunity of renewing my welcome to them.

The Annual Report, Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Account for the year ended 30th June, 1983 have been in your hands for some time now. May I, therefore with your permission, take them as read?

In retrospect— a year of remarkable performance

The year under review has been one of significant achievement for your company and there have been many landmarks in pursuit of your company's growth.

Your company announced a maiden dividend of 20% for the year under review as against 13% promised at the time of public issue. The highlights of all round progress of your company, include a 95% rise in the turnover (Rs.28.74 crores against 14.77 crores in previous year), over 100% increase in Reserves (Rs.2.05 crores against 1.01 crores in 1981-82); the Shareholders' Funds also increased by more than double. Encouraging results have been achieved in the sale of toilet soaps—OASIS AND KALPA—and the marketing network has now spread to the remotest corner of the country.

The most spectacular achievement of your company has been the commissioning of its Soyabean Processing Unit at Mandideep, an industrially backward area, near Bhopal. This unit which is the largest of its kind in the country, is now operating at its full capacity of 300 MT per day.

Production Operations

The two factories at Ludhiana and Bhopal, are located strategically next to the raw material base. Ludhiana is centrally located in the heart of paddy growing areas in Punjab. The company is, therefore, assured of an uninterrupted supply of rice bran.

There are nearly 35 Solvent Extraction Plants for processing Rice Bran, producing Rice Bran Oil to the tune of 300 MT per day. Our requirement of Oil for the Ludhiana Plant is about 70 MT per day. It is, therefore, not difficult for the company to produce Rice Bran Oil from the solvent plants scattered all over Punjab. In view of this, assured supply of Rice Bran Oil is ensured. This Oil is upgraded through our 50 MT per day Fatty Acid Unit and 50 MT per day Hydrogenation Unit to produce main ingredients for toilet soaps, stearic acid and industrial oils.

Likewise, the location of 300 MT per day Mandideep plant near Bhopal is close to the sources of raw material such as Soyabean (Production in Madhya Pradesh is 6 lakhs tonnes in 1983-84 as compared to 3 lakh tonnes in 1982-83), Sal Seed (around 1 lakh tonne in Madhya Pradesh) and Mohua seeds etc. This is a versatile plant capable of handling any oil bearing raw material including minor oil seeds. The Mandideep plant produces Soyabean Oil for domestic consumption and Soyabean and Sal Extraction and Sal Oil for exports. The plant will make substantial contribution to the national exchequer by earning valuabe foreign exchange.

Marketing—the sinew for growth

Your company in a short span of a year could establish a professionally managed marketing network spreading throughout the country to handle distribution and sale of its consumer products.

At present, there are 300 field staff headed by experienced Managers catering to over 1500 stockists and over 2.5 lakh retail outlets in the country. 30 Depots and 4 Regional Offices service the distribution network, unrivalled for its reach and penetration. No mean achievement by any yardstick.

The strategy adopted by your company for deep penetration is based on the consumer need and preference, obtained through a systematic market research and feed back, monitored by in-house professionals assisted by expert professional agencies in the country.

On the promotional front all traditional media such as Television, Press, Radio, Point of Sale material, etc., are effectively put into use. In order to reach our products to millions of consumers in the vast countryside, specially equipped audio visual vans are operated. Door to door sale through a special field force ensures the consumer to evaluate the virtues of our products and also enables the company to get constant feedback from the consumer. These apart, efforts are on to adopt innovative promotional media to put across our product message to the consumer.

The field force is exposed to an organised training and orientation programme to equip themselves with adequate skill for effective distribution and merchandising.

Plans are under way to evolve revolutionary concepts for distribution not only for the existing products but other new consumer products to be handled by

A year of remarkable performance

A future of new opportunities

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your company. This innovation will impart a new dimension to consumer marketing.

Unfortunately, the recent imposition of tax on advertising expenditure is a major constraint to any consumer product oriented company and particularly, the new companies like yours are hard hit. It is hoped that the government will take a fresh look and would adopt a more pragmatic approach to dilute the problems. As it stands today, it is practically impossible for newer entrants to make a dent in consumer marketing and it remains the mainstay of brands established in yester years. Fresh inputs in consumer sales will create healthy competition and constant inflow of sophistication in quality to the consumer's advantage. This basic philosophy shall continue to guide your company's destiny in the years ahead.

Research and Development

As the name suggests, your company's endeavour has been directed to harness agriculture produce and waste to effective industrial use.

India is the largest producer of paddy in the world, next to China and therefore, the products of paddy such as rice bran and rice husk are abundantly available in the country. Furthermore, the country has a rich reserve of oil seeds of tree and forest origin. These reserves have not been fully exploited for want of infrastructure facilities for collection of seeds and lack of know-how for utilisation.

The research and development wing of your company has succeeded in making good toilet soap, particularly, a white soap in the popular price range. For your information, this is the only pure white soap in the popular range available in the country. At the Ludhiana Plant, rice husk has been put into use for generating steam for industrial use in place of fuel oil or coal which are not naturally available in the State of Punjab.

It has been found that rice husk ash obtained after control burning could be gainfully used in the Chemical Industries such as Cement, Activated Carbon, Carbon Black, Sodium Silicate, Silica Gel etc. The R&D has made considerable progress in this direction.

Significant progress has been achieved to upgrade the non-conventional oil such as Karanja, Neem, Kusum, etc. and put them into effective use for production of toilet soaps and other industrial fats. Plans are underway to upgrade Sal fat to manufacture substitute for cocoa butter used in the confectionery industry.

The R&D has made substantial progress in the manufacture of detergents raw material from minor oils and plans are afoot to introduce detergent powder and cakes using this base in place of conventional petro-chemical ingredients.

Yet another achievement of the R&D is the development of a unique luxury soap in the premium segment with a novel packaging. Consistent efforts are being made for cost reduction in all areas of inputs and by adopting updated technology.

Your company has finalised plans to create infra-structural facilities for efficient handling of your company's export cargo at the Kandla Port by putting up silos, material handling equipment, mechanisation of movement of outgoing cargo. On completion of the project, it will be possible to handle about 2 lakh tonnes of cargo per annum equivalent to Rs. 50 crores. This is the first time in the country that any private sector company has taken initiative to provide such facilities at the port area.

The future—full of new opportunities

Your company is geared to expand its operations. The installed capacity of the Fatty Acid plant has already been increased from 4500 MT to 15000 MT per annum. Production of toilet soap is expected to rise to over 15000 MT by June 1984. A separate plant for toilet soap has been envisaged with a capacity of 30000 MT per annum. The edible oil refining plant located in the premises of the Mandideep factory will go on stream by the end of January, 1984. The launching of refined oil in various consumer packs would start soon thereafter.

The immediate plan is to bring out a unique luxury soap with novel packaging in the premium toilet soap segment.

Further diversification of your company's activities include production of detergent powder and cake based on a unique technology as already explained.

Your company has achieved a turnover of around Rs. 15 crores during the first four months of the current year and we are optimistic that the total turnover of your company for 1983-84 will be more than double that of 1982-83.

On the export front, the present trend indicates that your company will reach an all time record of export earnings of over Rs. 15 crores in 1983-84.

Equity and Debenture Issue

In order to finance these expansion and modernisation plans and to augment the long term working capital, the Directors of your company propose to issue debentures and equity shares shortly. The necessary resolutions are already with you for your approval.

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen, inspired by the success in the past, your company is poised for greater strides in the near future. In all the activities of your company the watch word is CONFIDENCE. Your company, therefore, looks forward with confidence to usher in a better tomorrow for the service of the consumer and thereby, the mankind.

Before I conclude, I would like to record our deep sense of gratitude to the various commercial banks and financial institutions for their timely support in meeting our financial requirements. I extend my thanks to all men of Oswal Agro for their dedicated service, to our suppliers and customers for their loyalty and to you, our shareholders, for your continuing support.

On this occasion, let us pray to the Almighty for His blessings which have been our strength in all our endeavours.

Thank you.

Note: This does not purport to be a record of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

In pursuit of success...

PRESSMAN

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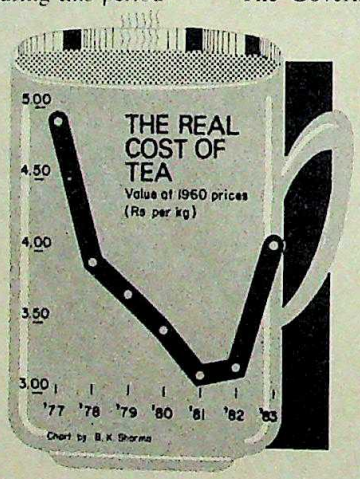
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TEA

Banned Brew

GOVERNMENT has a habit of queering the pitch whenever large sums of money are involved. So it was with the Indian tea industry last fortnight when it received a totally unexpected Christmas present in the form of a complete ban on the export of CTC teas (curl, tear and crush (CTC) is the method of producing this granular tea variety), except for those consignments for which commitment had been made before December 24. The edict was a brutal shock for the industry which was sitting pretty with a bumper crop of over 580 million kg and doing roaring business in world markets. The ban came on the heels of massive income tax raids on tea company offices and directors' homes, and the two taken together amounted to a particularly gloomy prelude to the new year.

January to March is the lean period for tea and the Tea Board says that the ban was necessary to ensure that during this period CTC production remained at home to ensure a cheaper cuppa for Indians. Although prices at the Calcutta auction fell by Rs 8 a kg, industry sources pointed out that as it normally took two months for the tea to reach retail outlets from the auction centres, the consumers would not immediately benefit. There was also no guarantee that retailers would sell cheap what they might have bought cheap and Tea Board Chairman Jagdish Khattar admitted: "We also are aware of these facts and know that there cannot be any immediate benefit for the consumers."



Gloomy Prospects: For the ban to be really useful, it would have to be continued over a long period and this could have disastrous consequences. As V.K. Awasti of Bush Tea, one of the major blenders from UK-based companies pointed out: "If the ban continues for long then we will lose a lot of ground to competitors like Sri Lanka and Kenya and it is our experience that lost ground cannot be made up. When the export duty on tea came in 1977 (during the Janata regime) we lost the American market and we are yet to get it back."

Awasti further pointed out that if CTC continued to be kept out of the world market then growers in the Dooars of north Bengal and Assam would prefer the Gauhati auction, where the costs are cheaper, to Calcutta whose port would be meaningless with exports not allowed. Also, the shippers would be hard hit as the container services depend a lot on tea for their business. Khattar admits: "As people engaged in the task of promoting tea in the world market, we also would not like a situation in which exports suffer."

Competitive Success: Meanwhile, other countries like Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are making hay. Prices at the London auction appreciated by a whopping 70 pence in a week to 320 pence (over Rs 45) a kg. Complained Vijay Dudeja of Contemporary Tea Company: "While we are not there to share any portion of this cake, the others are simply lapping it up. Currently Bangladesh tea of the same variety which we grow in the Dooars is selling in London at a price which is Rs 4 more than the normal." Retorted Khattar: "In those places not more than 15 per cent of the tea produced is consumed locally and so they can go in for boundless exports. Our domestic consumption is 70 per cent and thus we have a far greater responsibility to our domestic consumers."

The Government contends that there can be no question about India not meeting her international commitments. Said Khattar: "This year we have exported 205 million kg, which is 5 million kg more than what we have been sending out for the last 30 years. Our moral obligations have surely been fulfilled." He further maintained that there should be no comparison with the situation developing after the imposition of export duty in 1977: "That duty had been imposed on all types of tea and irrespective of the time when the contract had been entered into, which hit the buyers hard. This time we are allowing the contracts for CTC entered into prior to December 24 to be honoured and have also left out the orthodox tea which is continuing to do good business."

Faulty Reasoning: What he seemed to ignore was that orthodox (which accounts for only about 180 million kg of the current RKO production) has a very limited home market and a ban on its export would not have benefited consumers. In fact the limited supply and high prices of orthodox caused the Soviet Union, one of the principal buyers of Indian tea, to go in for CTC brokens in a big way towards the close of last year and prices shot up from Rs 26 to around Rs 30 a kg. And the ban came when Jordan, a major Middle East buyer, overcame long held reservations to accept CTC brokens under the brand name of 'Sunrise'. Now if the b continues, for Indian CTC it may well turn to be sunset in Jordan.

Meanwhile, exercises are on to coun the impression that the tea industry making runaway profits. According to such exercise, while the average price of at the Calcutta auction rose from Rs 15.70 1977 to Rs 22.50 in 1983, the real value terms of rupee worth (taking 1960 as base) fell from Rs 4.90 to Rs 4.09. Also, wh tea is considered an essential item by the G vernment, last fortnight it was being poi out that while between 1980 and 1983 a had recorded a 16.6 per cent increase in pr the rise in the case of coffee had been 66.6 cent, in the case of medium rice 85.7 per c and mustard oil 118.2 per cent.

But while these figures might be val last fortnight the Government seemed b bent on telling people that tea profits w much too high and hence needed to be ch ked. However, few are willing to bet that decision is going to add cheer to the comm man's cup.

—SUMANTA

THE MARKETS

Happy New Yea

WELL begun is half done, and 19 Orwell or no Orwell, seems to b ready up and away. A number shares have apparently caught a whiff of new year and forged ahead despite quit few question marks that inevitably raise th heads at this time of the year. Atlas Cop Chloride, Elecon, Colgate, Hindustan M tors, Kirloskar Oil, Ranbaxy and SPIC h crossed last year's high within a week of new session and seem ready to lead the c rent year's bull movement. A week is course too short a period for this kind thing but so many straws in the wind can't totally ignored either.

The blue chips did not really do th well last year and were beaten to the post b large number of obscure scrips which w not much in the limelight. They inclu cement companies like Rassi and Andhra complete outsider like J.K. Cotton and ne comers like Lohia Machines and 20th Cen ry, none of which were much in the picture this time last year. In fact, the blue chips sh some of their lustre by the year-end tho they did start well enough. Premier Auto a Usha Alloy lost 30 per cent over the year, f lowed by Mahindra Ugine, Ambalal Sara hai and Indian Rayon (between 20 and per cent drop in price) and Bombay Dyein Tata Steel, Tata Chemicals and Telco (dro of 10 to 15 per cent). Tata companies seem have had a poor year. It is unlikely th would do better this year either, as th really don't have much up their sleeve.

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ACTIVE STOCKS

	High 1983	Low	Close 6.1.84	Change on Fortnight
Alembic Chemicals	147.50	120.00	121.25	(3.75)
Ashok Leyland	37.65	29.50	36.00	3.00
Asian Paints	46.00	29.00	46.00	2.00
Associated Cement	461.50	325.00	372.50	(16.50)
Atlas Copco	36.50	25.00	42.50	7.00
Bajaj Auto	1,800.00	990.00	1,620.00	(60.00)
Ballarpur	48.00	37.40	49.40	1.90
Baroda Rayon	312.00	210.00	256.00	5.00
Bata India	33.50	18.05	34.10	0.60
Birla Jute	62.20	46.10	58.20	(0.20)
Blow Plast	74.50	38.00	45.00	(1.50)
Bombay Dyeing	96.00	57.50	70.00	8.00
Britannia Industries	40.25	23.75	37.50	(2.75)
Brooke Bond	37.20	26.00	35.80	(1.30)
Ceat Tyres	285.00	195.00	275.00	12.50
Century Spinning	890.00	695.00	865.00	22.50
Chloride India	67.65	45.00	49.00	1.75
Coates of India	27.87	21.50	28.25	0.44
Colgate	101.00	84.00	105.00	7.00
Cynamid	33.00	23.00	36.00	3.50
DCM	105.50	32.31	75.50	0.50
Dunlop India	28.40	20.00	27.10	0.70
East India Hotels	33.50	20.00	30.50	(2.50)
Elecon Engineering	38.00	29.00	43.00	5.00
Escorts	83.00	39.75	73.00	(6.50)
Food Specialities	91.50	50.50	71.00	1.00
Glaxo	31.50	20.00	24.50	nil
Goa Carbon	29.00	17.00	25.00	(1.00)
Guest Keen Williams	23.00	18.00	21.70	(0.40)
Gwalior Rayon	55.75	44.00	57.00	3.00
Hindustan Aluminium	48.00	32.10	50.05	2.25
Hindustan Lever	71.50	48.58	58.50	6.50
Hindustan Motors	39.30	26.40	41.72	2.42
Indian Aluminium	25.25	16.25	24.80	(0.30)
Indian Explosives	28.00	22.00	27.50	(0.50)
Indian Organic	35.00	25.50	32.50	(0.75)
Indian Rayon	86.00	62.50	71.00	nil
ITC	44.85	31.50	32.00	(2.00)
Jaysbree Tea	44.25	20.35	44.50	0.30
J.K. Synthetics	57.50	32.00	46.10	0.10
Kelvinator	93.00	70.00	94.00	1.50
Kesoram	68.10	55.80	61.30	1.30
Kinetic Engineering	163.00	68.00	132.00	(3.00)
Kirloskar Oil	28.25	13.25	33.25	5.25
Kothari (Madras)	29.00	16.25	25.75	(3.25)
Larsen & Toubro	79.00	52.00	79.00	2.00
Lipton	31.80	14.00	27.75	(4.05)
Lokia Machines	90.00	40.00	85.00	7.00
Madura Coats	23.40	15.30	23.65	0.25
Mahindra & Mahindra	66.00	42.00	56.50	(1.50)
Modi Rubber	35.37	22.69	27.75	(0.75)
Motor Industries	292.50	220.00	252.50	7.50
Mysore Cement	62.50	36.00	56.00	(5.50)
National Organic	207.50	156.25	197.50	15.00
Orient Paper	51.90	40.20	51.60	0.20
Premier Auto	276.00	229.00	263.50	12.50
Ranbaxy	50.00	36.00	53.00	4.50
Raymond Woollen	65.00	36.50	69.50	5.50
Reliance	183.00	100.00	123.50	9.50
Remington Rand	40.75	19.00	37.50	(2.75)
Shaw Wallace	48.75	22.20	47.00	0.25
Shriram Fibres	41.50	21.75	33.25	(1.75)
SPIC	30.81	15.25	32.00	1.19
Straw Products	54.10	38.30	53.30	(0.70)
Tata Chemicals	67.00	49.50	58.00	1.25
Tata Steel	322.50	234.50	263.00	7.50
Telco	455.00	390.00	395.00	(1.00)
Texmaco	59.00	38.00	58.10	5.10
Tribe Investments	20.50	16.00	21.50	1.00
Union Carbide	27.70	21.50	27.50	1.90
Usha Martin Black	26.50	22.00	21.75	(1.00)
Voltas	405.00	262.00	365.00	(40.00)
Zuari Agro	40.50	22.50	39.50	(0.08)
Unit Trust	14.10	12.25	13.65	0.15

Automobile shares should by and large do better this year as also those of leasing companies. The leasing concept is new to this country but leasing business seems to have a large potential for growth. It is not generally known that roughly three-quarters of plant and machinery in the United States has been acquired on lease, and between 40 and 50 per cent in Europe. In this country, the idea has not yet caught on but something like 50 companies are said to be ready with new issues. It all depends on the Government's attitude, not only to leasing but also to the private sector in general. There have been reports to the effect that some arm-twisting is being tried on companies which do not see eye to eye with the Government on the non-resident issue. Last year, the mini-boom was mainly the result of the entry of a couple of high-powered non-residents into the share market. This year might see a backlash developing unless the issue is sorted out amicably without further delay.

Excellent Records: Some companies apparently do well, year in and year out, though they are not always in the public eye. Larsen & Toubro, Chloride and Ranbaxy don't have much in common but they have an excellent track record and this may be their year in more ways than one. Larsen & Toubro have diversified into cement and shipping, Chloride is likely to be a beneficiary of the Maruti fall-out, and Ranbaxy which began with a solitary plant in Delhi will soon be operating from plants in three states. All these things ultimately add up for that is what growth is about.

Share markets all over the world did well last year, despite or possibly because of the recession, since the recession helped the corporate sector shed some of its fat and get back in the running. The recession is not yet over—and may not be over for maybe two or three years, if not more—but there are already signs that the clouds are lifting and a number of leading sectors, including automobiles in the US, have begun to see the light at the end of the tunnel. The Indian economy has the slenderest link with the world at large but there is no reason why it should not benefit from the brighter world environment. Shipping is a case in point. Shipping shares have been depressed for a long while but with an improvement in world trade, this particular business should do better.

It might, however, be a good thing to hold one's horses until the political clouds have lifted, though they never really disappear completely. The budget is one hurdle; the second hurdle might be the mid-term poll. It should be clear by March or so—the budget itself should indicate whether a poll is on the cards. Not that it makes much difference, but one never knows, and one can't be too careful when dealing with politicians.

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

Country	Unit & Currency	TT Selling Rates (Rs)	TT Buying Rates (Rs)
Australia	1 As $	9.7601	9.6644
Austria	100 As Sch	54.5158	53.9349
Bahrain	1 Dinar	27.3471	27.6537
Bangladesh	100 Taka	42.3524	42.0582
Canada	1 Can. $	8.6103	8.5179
Denmark	1 D Kr	1.0608	1.0493
Egypt	1 Egp £	12.6336	12.5456
France	1 Fr Frc	1.2565	1.2433
Hong Kong	1 Hk $	1.3790	1.3638
Indonesia	100 Rupiah	1.8512	1.0439
Iran	100 Rial	12.0099	12.9265
Italy	100 Lt Lira	0.6400	0.6306
Japan	100 Jap Yen	4.6249	4.5775
Kenya	1 K. shilling	0.7652	0.7599
Kuwait	1 Dinar	35.7964	35.5477
Malaysia	1 Ml	$4.5935	4.5438
Mauritius	1 Rupee	0.8368	0.8310
Nepal	1 Rupee	0.7029	0.6980
Netherlands	1 D Glds	3.4177	3.3816
Pakistan	1 Rupee	0.7919	0.7864
Singapore	1 Sing $	5.0478	4.9922
Spain	100 Sp Pt	6.7600	6.6940
Sri Lanka	1 Rupee	0.4271	0.4241
Sweden	1 Sw Kr	1.3194	1.3046
Switzerland	1 Sw Frc	4.8142	4.7639
Tanzania	1 T. Sch	0.8532	0.8473
Thailand	100 Baht	45.4100	45.4040
UK	1 Pound	15.1336	14.9993
USA	1 US $	10.8350	10.7075
UAE	1 Dihram	2.8544	2.8345
USSR	1 Rouble	13.4911	13.3974
W. Germany	1 DM	3.8332	3.7929

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo, Ltd., New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 9th January '84.

ECONOMIC TRENDS

	Latest	Change on month
PRICES		
ET Commodity Price Index* January 6, 1984	285.6	7.1
Cereals	255.3	4.1
Chemicals	320.6	(20.1)
Industrial Fibres	196.6	9.4
Metals	374.9	1.9
Sugar	204.4	4.0
Textile Yarn	222.5	(0.1)
Vegetable Oils	377.5	21.0
Gold, standard, January 6, 1984 (Rs per 10 gm)	1,845.00	(15.00)
Silver, .999 January 6, 1984 (Rs per kg)	3,530.00	(30.00)
SHARES		
ET Share Price Index* January 6, 1984	285.1	8.0
Cement	252.5	(8.1)
Chemicals	223.7	0.5
Engineering	507.6	27.9
Fertilisers	250.8	(1.4)
Man-made Fibres	425.5	(3.7)
Paper	562.7	15.9
Rubber Goods	216.9	13.1
MONEY		(per cent)
Money Supply, December 9, 1983		0.8
Bank Deposits		1.1
Foreign Exchange Assets		(20.4)

* 1969–70 = 100

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CHANDIGARH

Broken Promises

AS A CITY, Chandigarh was designed to work. Its architect Le Corbusier had crafted it like no other Indian city before—open and vibrant, with plenty of greenery and breathing space, and most important, plenty of room to grow. A city that was ready to give and to receive. If Le Corbusier could see his Chandigarh now, he would only see a city in a mess.

Several sectors of the city—which Le Corbusier had left green to function as the lungs of the city, have degenerated into slums. Parks and open spaces have been eaten away by shanty markets that have arisen in a haphazard way and cattle wander about freely in the Sector 17 piazza and the capital complex, close to the lake. As if the twin evils of land encroachment and slum dwellers were not enough, the dream city has had to face a new peril—the misuse of its valuable land by people with the right political connections.

Barely two months ago, when President Zail Singh laid the foundation of the International Nehru Centre, he probably didn't realise that the land had been earmarked for a students' hostel. The organiser of the centre, V.N. Tiwari—a Congress(I) Rajya Sabha member—had obviously pulled all the right strings. He had not only "usurped" the hostel land, he had also managed to bring the price of the 9,500 sq yards plot down to Rs 12.35 lakh—well below the market value of around Rs 78 lakh. At the same time he managed an agreement that allowed his organisation to pay the amount in 10 yearly instalments instead of the stipulated four, and at a reduced interest of 6 per cent. Despite these concessions, Tiwari never did submit detailed building plans.

There were official objections but Union Law Minister Jagannath Kaushal put an end to them when he dashed down to Chandigarh and told Chief Commissioner K. Banarji that it was in his own interest to allot the land. The file moved swiftly after that and in a record time of five months, the land had been allotted. Already Tiwari has paid the first instalment of Rs 1.2 lakh. The rest has been promised by old friends like Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal. Says Tiwari happily: "For us, money is no problem." And sure enough, he plans to collect Rs 1 crore in the future. "The centre shall be a happy mixture of both Triveni and the India International Centre, to study the ideas of Nehru who, to me, is equal to Marx and Mao put together," he says.

Misused Land: This is not the first time that scarce and costly land has been forced from the administration. Such cases are legion in Chandigarh. Many years ago, former Punjab Congress(I) president Sarla Prashar was given land close to the proposed Nehru Centre to build a working women's hostel. Grants were given by the Union Social Welfare Ministry as well as by the Punjab Government. The hostel never was completed but Prashar managed to bu two houses for herself. Till today, the c does not have a proper hostel for worki women.

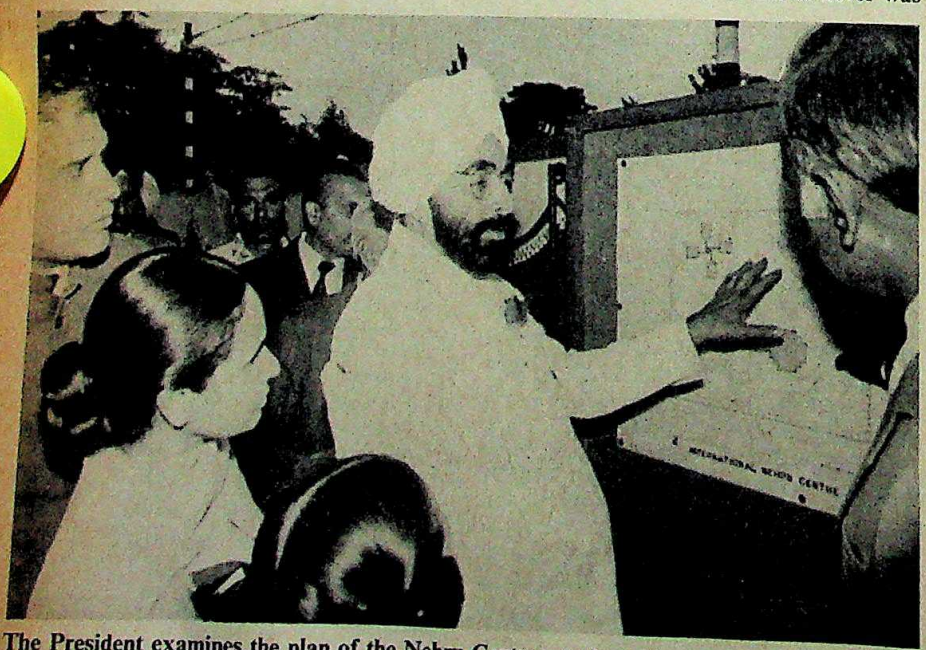
Similarly, the Shaheed Bhai Mati D Trust—founded by Giani Hari Singh, a porter of the Punjabi *Tribune*, and presi over by Giani Zail Singh—was given, 1, sq yards of prime land in Sector 11 at a thr away price of Rs 55 per sq yard when Z Singh was home minister. The project was commemorate the memory of martyr B Mati Das who was sawed alive by Aura zeb in Delhi's Chandni Chowk. But no took much interest in the project and building was not completed. Instead, s Hari Singh ruefully: "There has been unending debate on whether Zail Sin should continue to be its chairman after uming the charge of presidentship."

There are other chunks of valua land—allotted at prices ranging from Rs 6 Rs 150 per sq yard—lying waste. These clude plots given to Sanatan Dharma Pra nidhi Sabha, Kshatriya Khukhrain Sabh Bradlaugh Hall, a blood bank and at leas dozen other plots of various sizes dotting th city where not a brick has been laid.

What makes the situation so pathetic the number of schools and other institutio who are longing for just a small piece of lan Six years ago, Dr B.N.S. Walia, president the Indian Academy of Paediatricians, h proposed to set up a centre for handicapp children. He got only a lukewarm respon despite repeated pleas to the administrati and funds collected through a charity sh of a Hindi feature film. Said a disillusion Walia: "We have met silence only." Appl cations from well-established schools ha also been on the consideration list for years Said Harold Carver, principal of St S phen's School: "Since we have no politic influence, we have not even applied for plot."

While those with political clout manag to garner valuable land, those at the oth end of the spectrum—the poor—are sca ring Le Corbusier's city in their own wa Originally conceived as a straight-line c with areas neatly marked for the capit complex, the medical institute, the law cour and so on, the planners had left no room f slums. But the very slums that Chandigarh architects so valiantly fought against ha become a filthy reality right in the city their dreams.

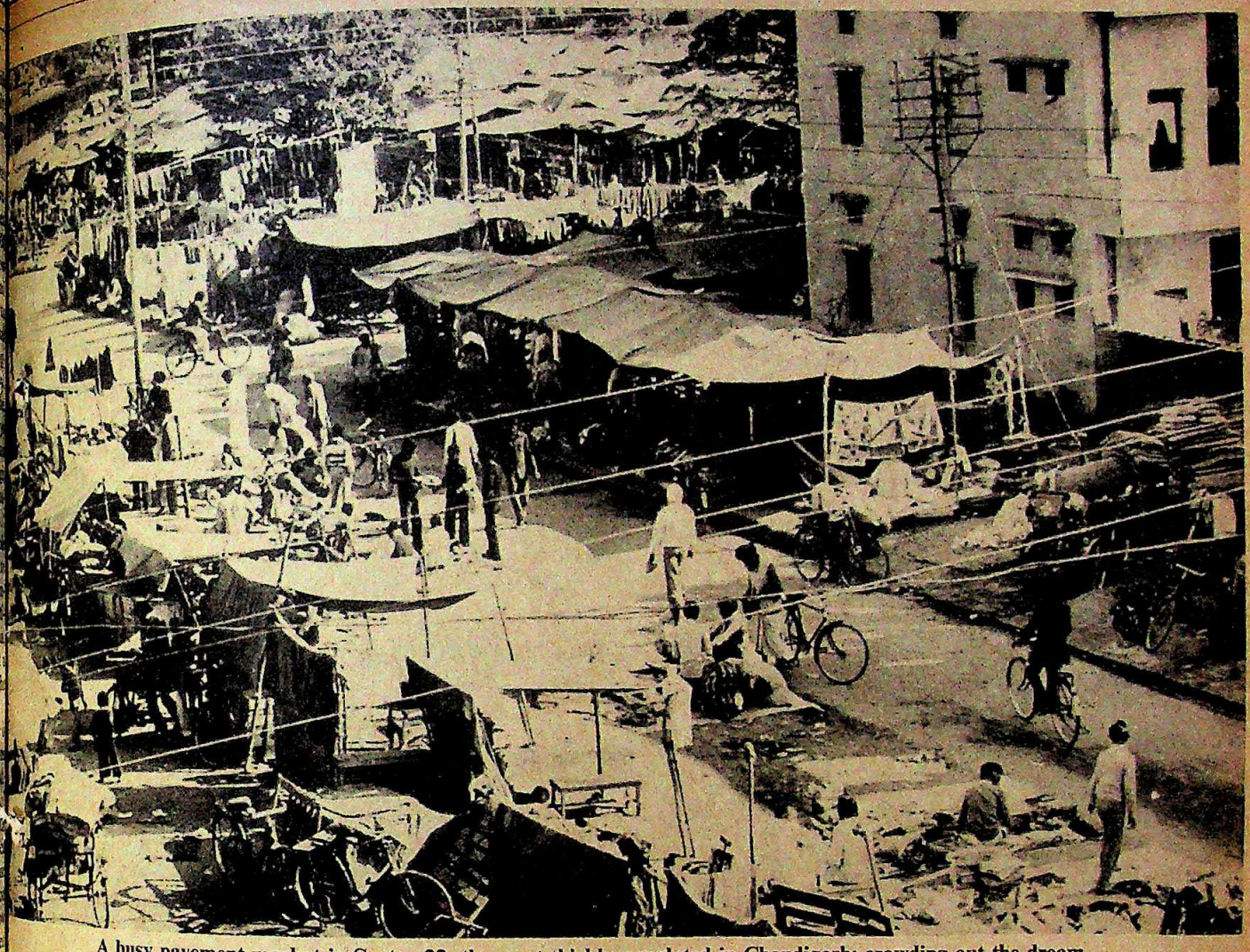
The most densely populated Sector 2 for instance, has lost all its open spaces crowded markets. Instead of its optimu population of 25,000, the sector already ha over 50,000 people. All the parks a walking paths have disappeared and *rehri walas* have even crept into the school play grounds. Similarly in sectors 15, 23, 2



The President examines the plan of the Nehru Centre—to be built on land earmarked for a hostel—while its promoter, V.N. Tiwari (left) looks on: forgetting the master plan

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A busy pavement market in Sector 22, the most thickly populated in Chandigarh: crowding out the dream

and 40. Said a senior architect: "Land ces are one reason for this mess." Chief ommissioner Banarji is almost in despair. aid he: "I know the situation, but as yet ere is no way out."

When Union Law Minister Kaushal opened some of these shops after a de- stating fire last year, he had declared: Poor *rehriwalas* cannot be ignored for the ke of architecture." But everyone knows t these small traders form the second st important vote bank which no politi- an can ignore. No doubt there are ex- nsive regulations against violations—ar- tecture control sheets, building by-laws d frame control—but all are obvious re on paper and less in practice. Said a ilding Department official: "We have ued notices on all violators and 3,500 es are pending in the courts."

The administrators blame the politi- inaction: No one is willing to take the me. The administrators blame the bureaucrats for this ns who blame the bureaucrats for this ks. Last month, in a meeting of the local isory committee (a nominated body of olitians and administrators) Chandigarh Deputy Commissioner Raghbir Singh promised to put an end to all violations and encroachments within 10 days if the members passed a unanimous resolution to the effect. No resolution, however, was passed and it looks as if encroachers are here to stay.

The latest blow yet to Chandigarh's master plan is being discussed in the corridors of the Union Home Ministry. The city's Lok Sabha representative Kaushal insist on retaining four villages in the second phase of the city's development and changing the master plan accordingly. The original plan had marked a five mile radius (initially 10 miles) around the city as controlled area, with an allowance only for farmhouses. What has happened over the years, however, is that several villages—in reality they are only slums—have crept up in this area. The second phase calls for cleaning them up. Villages, say town-planners, must be uprooted to plan cities.

The Congress(I) however has election promises to keep and has committed itself to keeping these villages where they are. Dr M.S. Randhawa, former chief commissioner and a fighter for Chandigarh since 1952 is against the preservation of "villages in their pristine squalor simply to fulfil an election promise". In a letter to Kaushal three months ago, he had suggested that the villagers be moved to a low cost sector and given cheap houses. Randhawa's letter has not even been acknowledged.

Town-planners are pessimistic about this rapid deterioration. Of the total 5 lakh population of the city, 40 per cent of the people now live in slums. What started out as small makeshift huts have become regular colonies and all the hope gathered around India's first planned city is slowly disappearing. Said Jagjit Singh, Punjab's chief town-planner: "In another five years, Chandigarh will be another Ludhiana or Amritsar with the only saving grace of the underground sewer system, if that does not choke by that time." Which will be an unfortunate tragedy, for even now the city—in its shady avenues and the remaining lush green parks—looks as if it would like to live up to its promise.

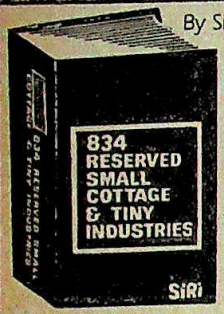
—GOBIND THUKRAL

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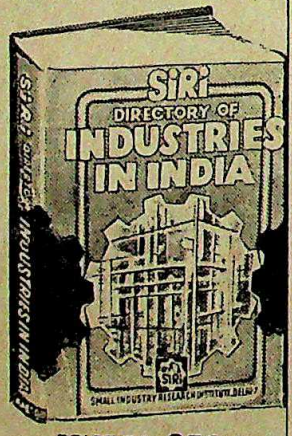
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EUCALYPTUS

The Tree Peril

THE STATELY, aromatic, and apparently innocuous eucalyptus tree has earned itself some deadly enemies in Karnataka. A drive to uproot the slender, fast-growing tree, originally an import from Australia, will begin on January 26 if the State Farmers Association carries out its threat. The association has threatened to cut down all the trees growing in the state unless the Government agrees to stop planting and distributing seedlings which it has been doing as a part of its afforestation strategy. Said association Convener M.D. Nanjundaswamy: "If the Government does not accede to our demand, we need only two days to ensure that eucalyptus is wiped out of Karnataka."

The farmers' anger is explained by the contents of a report by the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) team from Bangalore, which studied the social forestry programme of the Government in Kolar district in 1981, and came to the conclusion that the planting of eucalyptus was having a disastrous social, economic and ecological impact. It found that more and more farmers were being forced to switch to eucalyptus, causing a reduction in food production and firewood, as most of the trees thus grown were for industrial use. It also said that as a consequence of the programme, small and marginal farmers were getting poorer and rural unemployment was rising. Said J. Bandopadhyay, one of the team: "Ours is not a blind, emotional anger against eucalyptus, but is based on the scientific finding that the tree is causing irreversible social, economic and ecological damage to the rural population under the guise of social forestry."



The threatened trees

Determined Efforts: For the Forest Department, which has been making an all-out effort to afforest the state, such opposition comes as a bad blow. Says S. Shyam Sunder, the pipe-smoking conservator of forests: "I'm fed up with all this controversy over eucalyptus. All our efforts will come to a standstill if this attitude continues." The department has undeniably made large-scale efforts to promote afforestation: 12 crore seedlings—of which 7 crore were eucalyptus—worth Rs 4 crore altogether, to farmers. Already 1.33 lakh hectares have been planted with eucalyptus; and with the World Bank approving a Rs 55-crore project for social forestry in the state, another 1.5 l hectares of land are expected to be reser for eucalyptus.

When the trees, which take seven to years to mature, are in their full glory, t will cover hardly 2 per cent of the state's t geographical area of 19.2 million hect But the farmers are nevertheless dead against such an invasion. They believe tree in the long term will lower the w table, spoil the valuable topsoil, and des the land completely. The farmers there want the country's top soil scientists botanists to clear the project first. They a national seminar on it next month. M while, the Kerala Forest Research Inst also plans to organise a seminar on the on January 30, to settle the controversy.

But the Forest Department has taken a back seat on the issue either. T state's think-tank, the Ec omic and Planning Com released the minutes of meeting to the press. from causing damage, it c ms, the eucalyptus actu has a beneficial effect. T council found that "all socio-economic argum for and against eucaly versus food crops woul applicable to tree crop well" and found no re why eucalyptus should singled out for such cism. Also released were excerpts from a series of sci ific studies on eucaly which provided reassura

More Criticism: Bandopadhyay prom dubbed this a "highly misleading docum which falls apart like a pack of cards w examined critically". Calling it a "cun way to confuse farmers", he circulated counter-arguments in the State Far Association. In an attempt to wipe out suspicion that the Forest Department being influenced by industries in enco ging farmers to grow this particular which finds use in the paper and textile in stries, Shyam Sunder said that one m poles of eucalyptus would be sold to farm

Further, he said the state would ban export of eucalyptus; and already there a ban on growing the tree in irrigated a The state has offered 8 lakh hectares of on lease to paper and rayon industries, w they can grow eucalyptus to meet needs. The offer is expected to be take soon. However, if the farmers remain mant in their stand, the Forest Depart might have to make an alteration in its gan: Grow more trees—except eucaly

—RAJ CHENG

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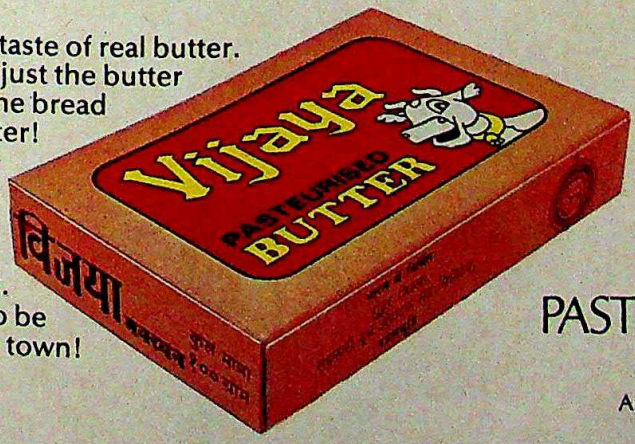
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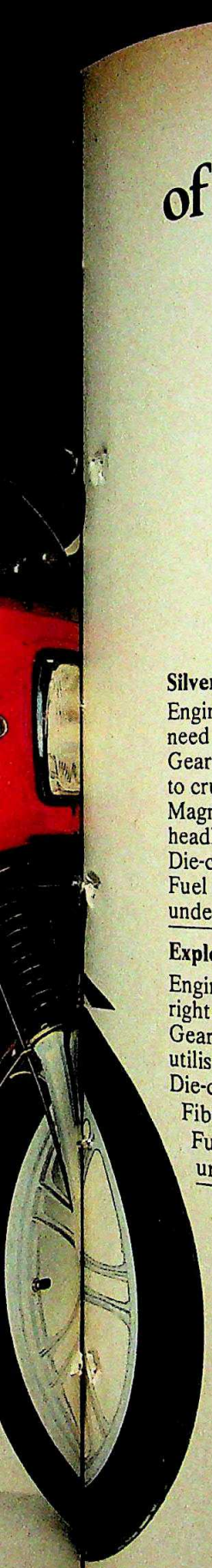
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Pot-pourri

URTAIN RAISERS
K. NATWAR SINGH
ress
ges: 327; Price not given.



"I OFTEN marvel at my good fortune and constantly thank the Cosmic Master for having dealt me such a good hand," says the author in his preface to this book, a collection of essays, reviews and letters written over the last 30 years in the course of a busy diplomatic career. The says are mostly biographical sketches of lebrities which diplomats posted abroad e often called upon to do for local newspaers, and the reviews are of books by or out Indians and India. Natwar Singh rites about Nehru and Gandhi, R. K. Naayan and E.M. Forster—there is a little too uch of Forster in the book—and Indian ers and Pahari paintings. It makes an intesting pot-pourri of a book that should e good bedside reading after a hard day the office or a last-minute birthday present a bookish nephew.

The author likes Forster and does not uch care for V.S. Naipaul. He also likes lk Raj Anand and Raja Rao whose old oks adorn Indophile bookshelves in arsdale, New York, and Hampstead, Lonn, but do not mean much to the preent-day Indian reader. The only author wrig in an Indian language mentioned in the ok is Pendse, a famous name in Marathi, he is mentioned by Forster, not by Singh. e author, an Oxbridge man, is not acainted with the Pendses of this world. o would, anyway, if you have Forster and n Suyin among your pen-friends?

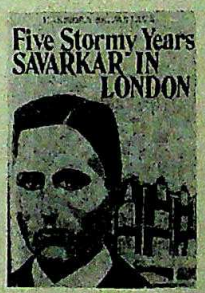
Inadequate Reviews: The essays and the views are pleasant enough, except when e author of the book is someone like Naiul. Natwar Singh tears into him like a and rightly so, but does not really tell reader why Naipaul, an intellectual cripwrites the way he does. Most of the reews are meant for foreign readers who uld have welcomed a little less indignation d a little more light.

Naipaul is neither Katherine Mayo nor erely Nichols and cannot be dismissed ther as a crank or a stool-pidgeon. He is as ious an anti-Indian, or more precisely ti-Hindu, critic as, say, Nirad Chaudhuri, ough they are not in the same class. The der, particularly the foreign reader, is likely to go away with the impression that there is much in Naipaul's writings that even a clever diplomat is not able to refute. Naipaul can be tackled properly only by another Naipaul and it is pity he was let off lightly.

The letters are, however, a delight. The author apparently started wooing celebrities rather early in his career; he wrote his first letter to Forster when he was only 23. Forster was rather fond of young men and also a copious letter writer. The letters are light, frothy stuff, a little gossip about literary politics in places high and low and much chitchat about comings and goings of friends and rivals. Incidentally, Forster is rather uncomfortable with Indian names and places and not too kindly disposed towards his critics. And then there is Rajagopalachari writing from Madras—there are 29 letters from him, nearly as many as from Forster—that "frail Indira Gandhi is having a hard time." The letter is dated December 1966, almost exactly 17 years ago, and the lady is still going strong. Frail, indeed! —JAY DUBASHI

Flying Colours

FIVE STORMY YEARS
Savarkar in London
by HARINDRA SRIVASTAVA
Allied
Pages: 326; Price: Rs 75



"PERHAPS never before in world history of law and justice," says the author at one point, "so many nations had been involved, directly or indirectly, and so many legal luminaries had assembled to discuss and judge the action of one man—a lean and slender youth of 27, measuring 5 ft and 2½ inches and weighing 115 pounds, called Vinayak Damodar Savarkar—the first Indian to be tried at the Hague International Tribunal."

Actually it was not Savarkar who was being tried at the Hague, but two countries, England and France, who were fighting over him. Savarkar was far away in a Bombay jail, charged with every political sin under the sun—and the sun never set on the British empire then—from waging war against the king to smuggling arms and bomb manuals into India and delivering seditious speeches against the empire. The Hague trial was a face-saving device that came to nothing, though the French prime minister had to resign for permitting the British police to seize Savarkar on French soil. He was being taken to India on a P&O steamer but had managed to slip out at Marseilles through the porthole of a water-closet.

This is a racy story of one man's fight against the entire might of the most powerful empire in the world and Srivastava tells it well. It was all over in four years. Savarkar arrived in London in June 1906 on a scholarship secured for him by Tilak and was taken back home in handcuffs in July 1910. During this period, the little man from Nasik had done nearly everything a revolutionary could do, from starting a school for terrorists under the very eyes of Scotland Yard to smuggling 36 Browning pistols into India

Well-researched Piece: Srivastava has done his homework meticulously, visited all the places associated with the man including India House in Highgate, the cellular jail in Port Blair and the sleepy town of Ratnagire where Savarkar was interned before his release in 1937, and examined original documents in India Office and other libraries. It is history as it should be written, history of a man as well as a period, and of a nation in the first throes of its struggle for freedom.

It is a pity Savarkar was put out of action for the best part of his adult life. He was not a bigoted communalist as he is often made out to be. If so, neither Lenin nor Gandhi would have sought him out in London. He met Gandhi twice and once shared a platform with him, but they don't seem to have hit it off. Not much was known of his meetings with Lenin but Srivastava says they met thrice, also in India House. And it was Jean Longuet, editor of the French communist newspaper, *L'Humanite* and grandson of Karl Marx, who raised his voice against Savarkar's illegal arrest on French soil.

There have been two distinct strains in India's political life since the British came on the scene. The first, leading from Tilak through Savarkar to Subhas Chandra Bose, might be called romantic idealist; the second, more practical and less averse to compromise, is the line that descends from Gokhale through Gandhi to Nehru. For some reason, the romantic idealists have always lost to the others. Reading this fine book, one wonders why the Savarkars and the Boses received such a raw deal; perhaps they were too revolutionary and uncompromising for the placid Hindu temper.

—JAY DUBASHI



Savarkar: a romantic idealist

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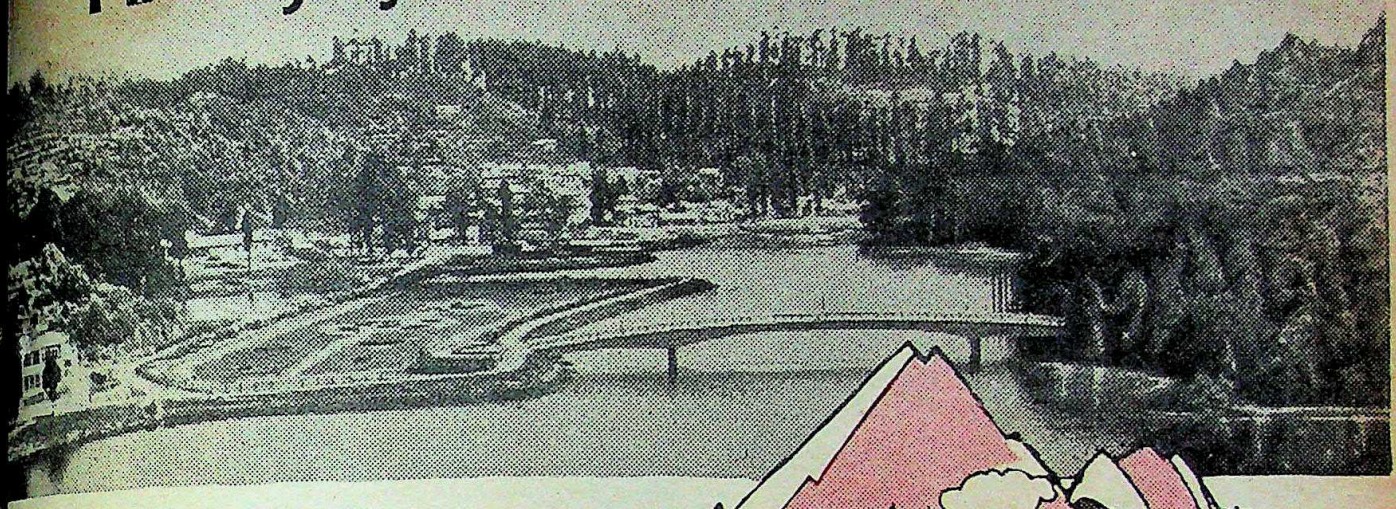
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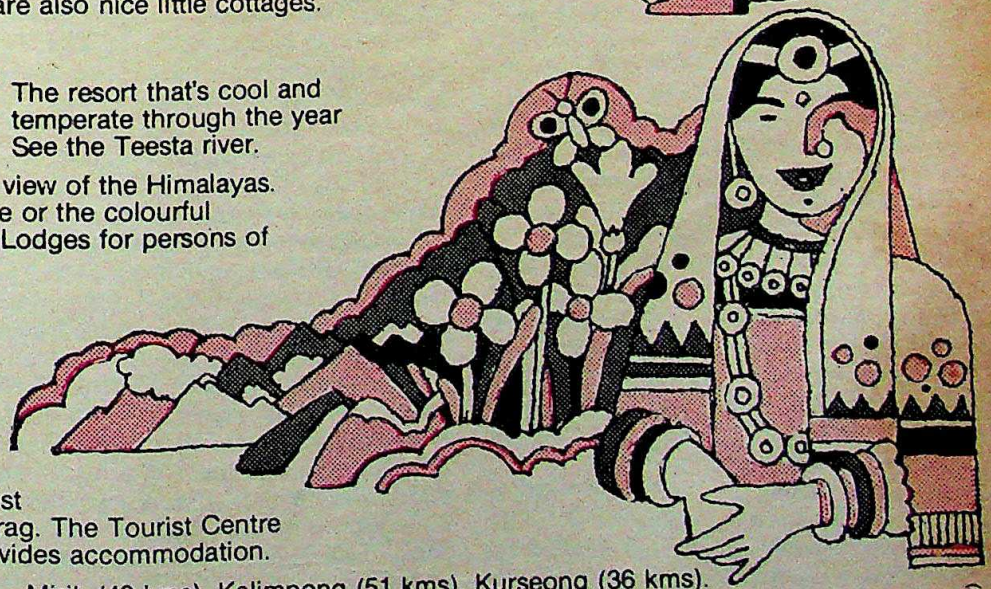
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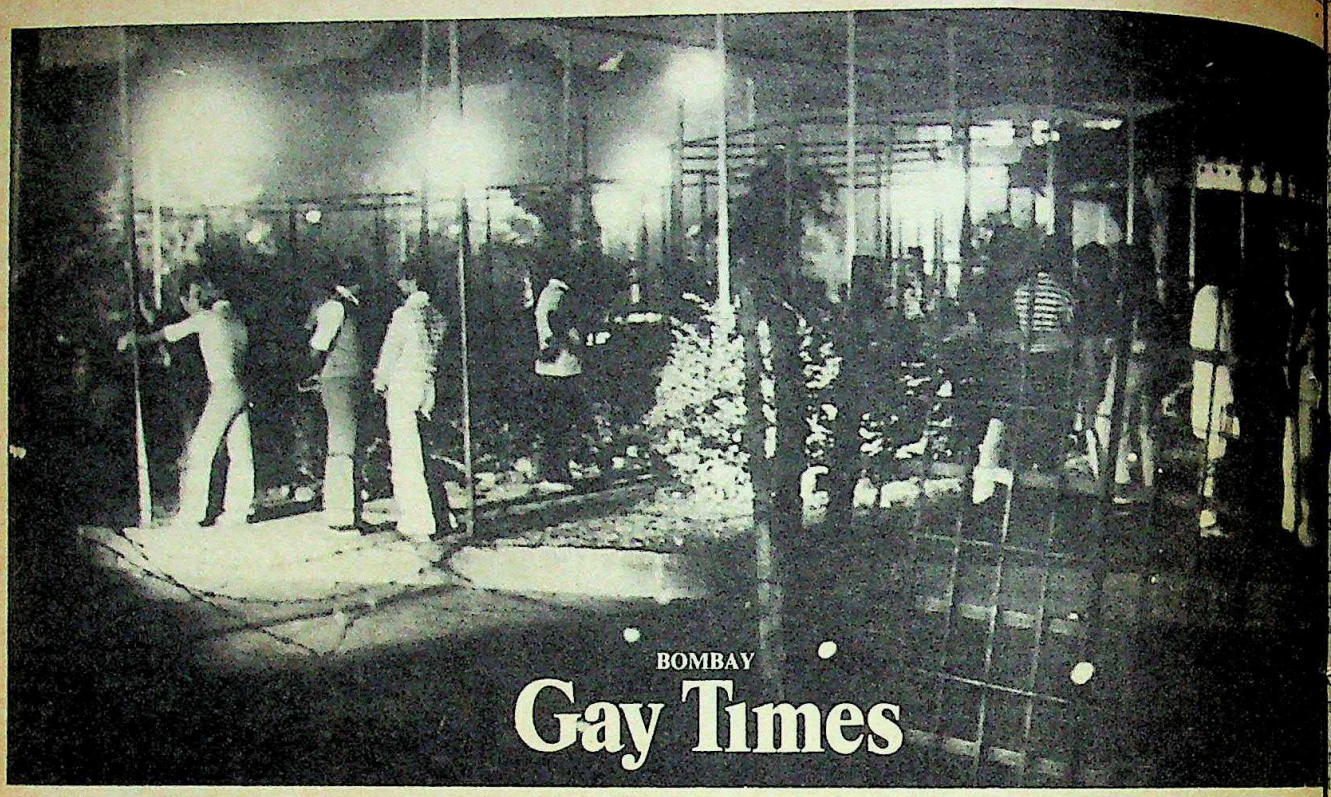
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Government of West Bengal

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BOMBAY

Gay Times

THE NEW Year's Eve festivities at Bombay's Bandstand park are somewhat different from the frolics of other celebrating groups in the city. The exclusively male revellers who gather faithfully at the children's park every new year, circle around the pony track, exchanging greetings with old friends, while some huddle in pairs in the darkness.

They are a diverse lot, in terms of backgrounds, looks and dress. Most seem conventional enough but a few sport such esoteric touches as ballet shoes, spangles in the hair, earrings, cat suits and knickerbockers. For this crowd of several hundred has one thing in common. They all practise what jurist Blackstone once referred to as "the unmentionable crime," homosexuality.

The new year assembly is a long-standing ritual in the city for expressing solidarity, and is known in gay parlance as "signing the muster roll". The faces of some of those who show up for the ceremony would surprise many non-homosexuals. They include well-known names in the film industry and elite social circles.

Young Initiates: A millionaire came in his limousine, took two quick rounds of the park and quickly whizzed off keeping his face slightly covered. What was immediately noticeable at this year's gathering however was the large number of young people who showed up, some of them looking as if they were barely out of school.

However, the large number at the gathering did signify finally the fact that more and more homosexuals are now feeling confident enough to come out of the closet and make an open declaration of their kind of sexuality. "Times are changing," admits Harsh, a homosexual businessman who lives in the suburbs. "In the old days whenever I walked out of my house some of the neighbours would jeer and shout derogatory names like 'pansy'. Now they are quite friendly." Says Koko: "It is not any longer the dark sin it once was." In fact it has become fashionable to have at least one gay couple at a swinging straight party.

Adds Vishal, a journalist: "Some people think I am being exhibitionist because I openly talk of my homosexuality. But I do this deliberately to show that I have nothing to hide and so that people will not try behind my back to use it against me in my profession. It is not that homosexuality is on the increase, it is just that more people from the upper class are willing to talk about it".

In Maharashtra last month, the festival to mark the brief marriage of the goddess Yellamma to the God Datta—traditionally a festival for prostitutes and eunuchs—was remarkable for the number of gays who used the occasion as an excuse to congregate. Most of the homosexuals who participated were from the mill areas of Parel and Lal Baug and the scores of lower middle class spectators merely looked away from this new dimension to an old rite. Among other places for gay meetings, railway platforms at Dadar and Malad have become well-known. The 8 a.m. mass on Wednesday at a prominent suburban church is almost exclusively ded by gays.

The New Year's Eve gay gathering Bandstand: out from the shadow

Gay Bashing: But if there is more ness about homosexuality today, the cal aggression against gays is also incre complain several Bombay gays. "P groups make a special point of gay b and will not allow two gays to sit pea on a park bench," complains Akbar Sena MLC Pramod Navalkar has laun special campaign for cleaning up Chow beach which he claimed had degenera night into a den for masseurs and ho xuals. As a result, the authorities recen posed a curfew at the beach betwee night and 5 a.m.

Navalkar is adamant about keepi city "clean". He has activated the po carry out several raids on B Bandstand, a favourite haunt for gay dark. Homosexuals are usually round under the nuisance act. Section 377 Indian Penal Code (IPC) which was ori designed for homosexuality, though, s used continues to serve as a conv threat to blackmail gays who dare no plain about being mugged. Even w constables catching homosexuals in cious circumstances are known to conf their watches and valuables, confide they will remain silent.

In fact under the law, homosex even by consent and in the priva

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's bedroom is illegal and can lead to a
ence of imprisonment for 10 years to life.
criminal lawyer Mahesh Jethmalani:
is an archaic law and should be scrapped
has been done in the West." Section 377
in fact depends largely on judicial inter-
ation, as it simply states that anyone who
consent has "carnal knowledge with
woman or animal against the order of
ure" is punishable. The Madras High
rt held in 1884 that oral intercourse was
against the order of nature, while in 1968
jarat judge gave the opposite ruling.
A more logical view comes from Pra-
Kothari, professor of sexual medicine
e Nair Hospital and T.N. Medical Colle-
"Today erotic encounters or part-
ships between two people of the same ge-
anatomy is not considered pathological
sickness. If a homosexual has a satis-
relationship in a positive way, he is
er off than not satisfying it at all or being
structive heterosexual."

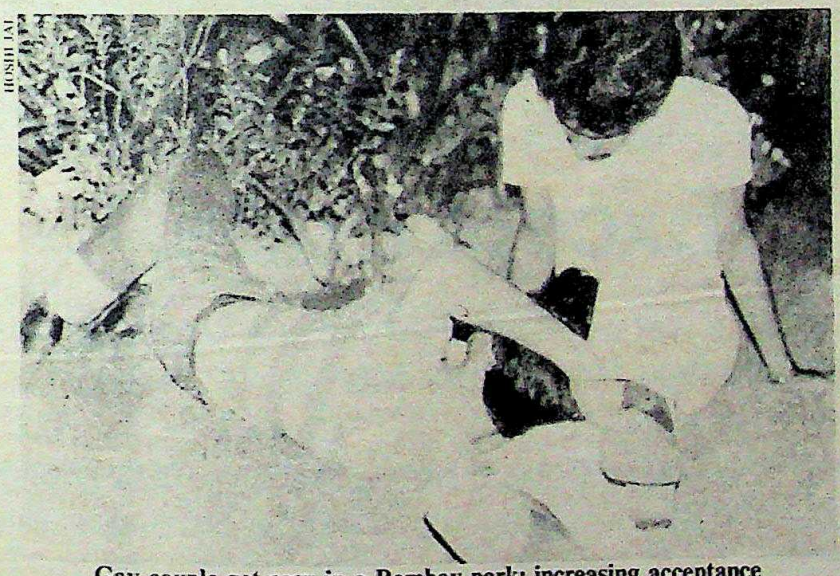
Gays themselves, while bitter about the criminatory law have never so far dared to me out in the open and challenge it. Twice the past Bombay homosexuals have med associations to pro- their rights but both s the attempt fizzled out. 1974 a homosexual tran- ger formed an organisa- *Dandebaz-e-hind*, basi- to provide physical ction to homosexuals g bullied by street gangs the railway police. A e serious attempt was s in 1978 when a an poet visiting India the initiative to arouse consciousness.

The group, known as Twilight Zone, at its had as many as 50 le attending meetings at at in south Bombay. he idea was to hold group ussions so that we could ome our fears of homosexuality and g home that there was nothing degenera- d it was only a sexual variation," said , one of the organisers. Even a non- sexual such as Shakuntala Devi, the matician who has written a book on osexuals, delivered a talk there.

But within a year-and-a-half, the Twi- Zone association folded up. Akbar at- es this to the fact that instead of being ps, the meetings disintegrated into mini s. Harsh agrees. Says he: "Five per of the audience was not listening but ead had a roving eye. They were using the as a cruising joint and a lot of long- ablished gay couples split as a result."

ONE NIGHT stands and short relationships are usual among homosexuals but some gay couples have stayed together for years and are as close as any husband and wife. Harsh, for example, has been living with his lover for the last six years. Says he: "I was 24 when I met Antony at the Gym and till then I had thought I was never going to settle down. When I first met him I wanted him not just for sex but as a friend which is why it took me four months to tell him how I felt. I found he reciprocated my feelings. Antony had gone out with girls in the past but he realised he was never aroused by them."

Harsh feels he is more fortunate than most homosexuals since he shares in a mutual love relationship. In most gay marriages, he says, it is love on one side and a marriage of convenience on the other. There is often a big age difference and a complete divergence of tastes and life-style. While both Harsh and Antony are invited to straight parties together, they seldom go because suddenly it has become "too acceptable". He says: "There is a falseness all around. It is only at a gay party that I can let myself go and admire a man openly."



HOSHI JAL

Gay couple get cosy in a Bombay park: increasing acceptance

And most homosexuals are quick to stress that what they admire are other men and not effeminate men dressed as women. Though homosexuals usually have a well developed aesthetic sense and an eye for fashion—having set the trend for safari suits, pathan suits and silk pyjamas—it is only a marginal few who enjoy dressing up in women's clothes. The drag queens or kothis, say most homosexuals, give all of them a bad name because of their tendency to show off and be outrageous.

Koko, who works in a family business, says he has to maintain two separate identities, "if I am to keep the respect of the people I am working with—though I draw the line at a tie and suit". He was dressed in a tasteful but completely masculine outfit of checked shirt, corduroy slacks and loafers but his wardrobe also contains a collection of dazzling spangly blouses, Hawaiian lungies, baggy pants and elegant shoes, which he keeps for night wear. He has been known, at a party he was hosting, to change his outfit ten times. "He could teach a woman tricks on make-up," says an air hostess friend.

Early Beginning: A strikingly large number of the homosexuals interviewed had their experiences at a very early age and quite easily accepted their sexuality. Says Vishal: "I was playing football and I found the whole team whistling when an attractive girl passed by. I knew there was something different with me since I didn't feel a thing. On the other hand, I was attracted to the football captain." Says Harsh: "I was only in the fourth or fifth standard and the other boy was in the tenth, but it was definitely I who took the initiative. I was a very beautiful child and I had no problem getting a partner. Most of my school mates readily did it once and then refused to speak to me again."

Says Koko: "The question of guilt never entered my mind. I knew when I was eight." He started reading on the subject by the time he was 12. All their families, some of whom are religious and highly conservative, have accepted their sons' decisions without much fuss. Says Vishal: "You can never fool your mother." Harsh recalls that his mother on her own accord hinted to him gently: "I don't think you should get married. Instead you look after me."

All the same, many gays are forced into marriage by their families which are bent on keeping up social appearances. Wives often bear their lot passively, not wanting their plight to be known. On the other hand, some homosexual patients have told Kothari that they genuinely want to do their duty by their wives by having children, even though they want their pleasure only with other men.

Navalkar insists that the gay world is unhappy because of "what happens to old homosexuals. You never see them around." Harsh agrees that "you have got to accept that age definitely counts in the gay world. After 50, nobody is going to invite you to parties any more. Parties stop meaning all that much as you grow older but that doesn't mean you stop being gay." —COOMI KAPOOR

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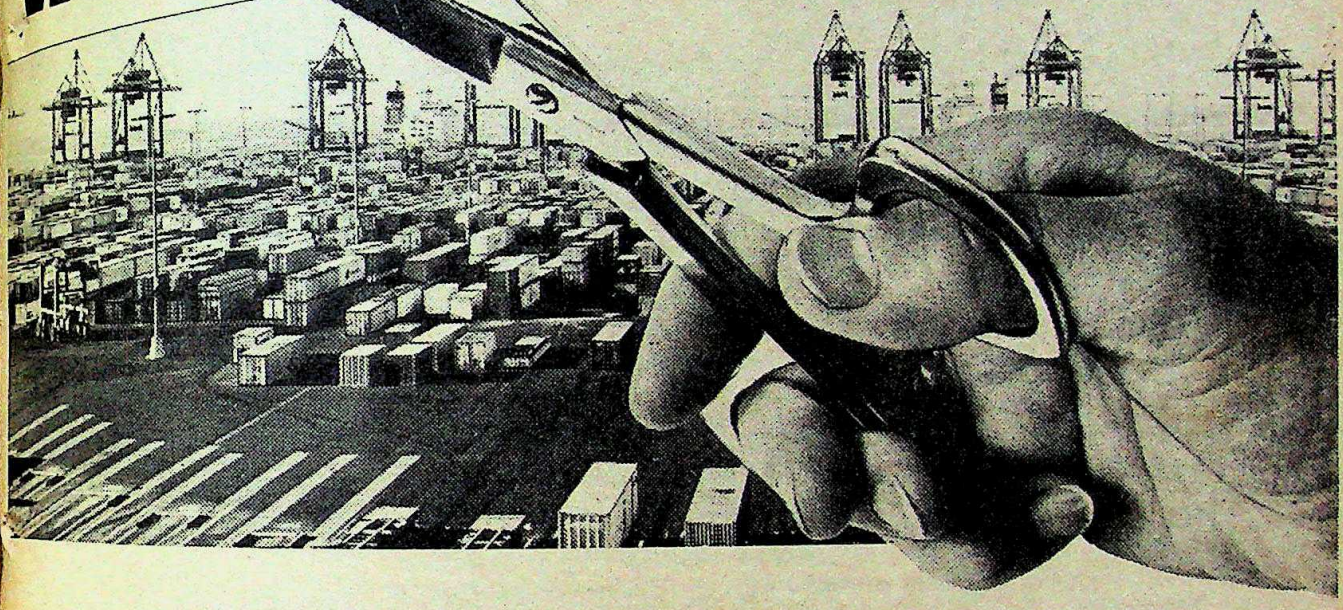
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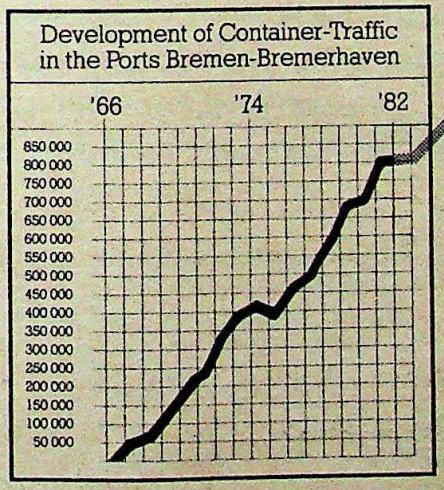
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MADRAS

Melodious Metropolis



BEGINNING about the middle of December, just after the fierce North-east monsoon has blown over the coast, the city of Madras becomes the performing arts city of India. Nowhere else in this country is there anything to match this coming together in one city of all the gifted and the creative, all the high points of single-minded endeavour in music and dance.

From the august premises of the Madras Music Academy hard by the posh hotel Chola Sheraton, the music and dance performances go outwards in one engulfing wave to the remotest suburbs. This is one city of India where, if you tell a cabman you would like to hear D.K. Pattamal sing, he will take you unerringly to the one sabha where she is featured.

There is for example the Mylapore Fine Arts Club, presenting the new frontierswoman of dance, Dr Padma Subramaniam one evening, and the diminutive 13-year-old mandolin prodigy Srinivasan the next. The young artiste, already a household name, raises a flawless and sonorous mayhem in foot-tapping Triputa tala in raga Latangi to the obvious delight of an appreciative audience.

Eminent Performers: Concert staples like Lalgudi Jayaraman, Balamurali Krishna or M.S. Gopalakrishnan come and go, reappearing now in one sabha and then in another. The controversial veena vidwan S. Balachandar is turning up the volume of his veena's contact mike one night in the naive belief that volume and vision in music are directly proportional, and in the next he is heard speaking with passion and authority on the art of the late Ustad Amir Khan at one of the festival's remote outposts.

The Tamil Isai Sangam begins on most days at 10 a.m. and pulls down its shutters at midnight, presenting a near-numbing array of talent, effort and dedication which has to be seen to be believed. The known, unknown, little-known and the famous are featured in the marathon sessions of these sabhas because they are all promised not just to the service of the arts but also to the cause of giving the talented, the struggling and the unknown a leg-up.

The Indian Fine Arts Society in residential Thyagaraja Nagar has an unbroken schedule of rich concert-level song, dance and drama. Here and there a little-known singer of Hindustani music is included for good measure and a sudden gleam of Yaman or Bageshri lights up the silence left behind from a lusty, rhythmic bout of Thyagaraja and Swati Tirunal. "It is absolutely incredible," says Dr Elihu Rosin who teaches music at Stockholm's Music Academy, "this city is like Salzberg in early summer or Spoletto in July. I come here every year and each year the crowds are larger, the programmes more varied and more serious than the last, and no one seems to tire."

Well-established Sabhas: Says K.S. Rajendran of the new Voice Culture Group in Triplicane: "These sabhas, associations and societies, let us not forget, are fully articulated institutions with a firm secretarial presence, mailing lists, treasurers and fund drives and are supported with little more than the passionate commitment to the arts and the modest financial resources of the residents of the districts where they are located. Yet their day-long sessions, through the festival fortnight, have standing-room only."

The music and dance performances go outwards in one engulfing wave to the remotest suburbs of Madras. This is one city of India where, if you tell a cabman you would like to hear D.K. Pattamal sing, he will take you unerringly to the one sabha where she is featured.

There is Rukmini Devi's hallowed Kalakshetra not far from the sea in Adyar with thatched roofs, palm trees and rolling sand, where the dancers of tomorrow are in the making. They are living temple frescoes, tumbling out of its classrooms once every year with ghungrus and uddyanas, straight out of the pages of Bharata's *Natya Shastra*.

Atop these many organisations that fill the city is the imposing presence of the Madras Music Academy, "fifty-six years young" according to its dynamic President T. T. Vasu, that sets standards and helps to focus and clarify major issues of style and usage. It functions as a kind of musical Vatican, a supreme synod of what should or should not, according to tradition, evidence and practice be allowed in Carnatic music.



Padma Subramaniam: unique line

Every year, since its inception in
when the Indian National Congress h
session in the city, the academy has
stature, imagination and authority
name. Among the more interesting an
haps far-reaching of the academy's
policies is the limiting of the use of acco
niment in its concerts to the prescribed
cal minimum; and the use of the tanp
the sole drone instrument. This would
bably, in good time, eliminate the Ca
musician's perennial crutch, the ubiqu
sruti petti which according to the late
Keskar is "a crude asthmatic harmo
with two chords, a vile little objec
queathed to our music by the British a
with the railways." He had banished th
pered scale from the precincts of All
Radio, in his time.

Now that only the tanpura may be
as the drone instrument in the acad
concerts, "It is a relief to hear the voice
tanpura, like the voice of the turtle
heard in the land, from the doughty go
Miraj to those Tanjore beauties of ivor
gleaming wood," says Jesuit Father U
to Feroni from the University of Pe
Italy, who studies Indian drone instru

The Madras performing arts
bristles with differing points of view,
nately held combative postures and
troversies. Dr Padma Subramaniam, th
ellectual scholarly dancer, has take
unique line of her own in her interpre
of Bharata's *Natya Shastra* from wh
has evolved what she has aptly named
rata Nritya in which abhinaya, natya
costumes employ stylistic devices that

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ed and transpose the present rigid front- of different dance styles. Statuesque se- nces in her interpretations become frozen ion rather than static poses. "The pro- n with dance in Madras is to accept it as a fession and to call oneself a professional. , people are loath to do. What is wrong calling oneself a dancer by profession an engineer or a salesman?" asks a. "Any discipline to which you have your all should rightfully be your voca- . But first of course you must give your nd that is not as easy as it seems."

In her dance class in suburban Madras teaches whoever is gifted enough to make necessary sacrifices and comes to her g to learn .Often she teaches them free, e with a scholarship from a trust fund h her late father had established. Accor- to Ranga Rao, noted musicologist and . "There is a compelling tension and a us tranquillity in Padma's dance that s the conventional barriers and div- of schools and styles. Perhaps that is direction in which the future of Indian al dance will lie."

The unprecedented popularity of dance flected in the number of youngsters g to it. "There is much more music and ce in Madras now than at any other time re," say Dhananjayan and wife Shanta. ry home that has a growing girl in it re- ds with the sound of ankle bells and the of drums and there is much more intel- t understanding, less prejudice and cau- about it." The dancer-couple are ducts of many years of training and ed performance under Rukmini Devi. y left Kalakshetra in the late 1960s to set their own school in Adyar. Tearing him- self from the institutional ambience of Kalakshetra and setting up on his own "called for many more skills than the ability to dance," says Dhanajayan. Today their flourishing dance school, Bharata Kalanjali, trains a gifted group of dedicated dancers, choreographers and musicians.

Vital Scene: Whether it is Balamurali Krishna with his distinctive voice culture or M.S. Gopalakrishnan with his felicitous access to the intonation of Hindustani music, apart from his own Carnatic inheritance, the musical milieu of Madras is one of challenge and innovation. "There is everywhere more of awakening into music today than ever before," says Natarajan, secretary of the Music Academy of Madras. "The instrumental techniques have progressed and developed beyond recognition, it is the voice that has lagged behind." Adds I. Ramaswamy, former student of the academy, now learning the tabla in Varanasi: "If you want to hear a good rounded tone on the violin, you have to listen to south Indian violinists. In the north, the only violinist worth the name is N. Rajam, and she is from the south."

One curious phenomenon comes in for comment. "The extraordinary fact is that there is no official support for this lively, lusty world of the performing arts in Madras. The thronging sabhas, nearly a hundred in number, are supported by the common man so that apart from the politics of music itself, we are blessedly free from the other politics," says T. V. Gopalakrishnan, one of the most gifted mridangam vidwans and singers today.

Inequities: "It is time we established a musicians' and actors' equity," says the urbane N. Pattabhiraman, a former U.N. official now editing the magazine *Sruti* which in the space of less than six months has acquired the reputation of being a major force in the world of music and dance. "The established performer hogs all the opportunities of exposure at fees less than a pittance at all the temples where performers are anxious to sing and play for exposure, so that the unknown struggling rearguard never gets a chance. The well-known names should not be allowed to perform at low rates more than thrice; in all other places, they should be required to charge their standard rates." *Sruti* contains comments, interviews and sanitised gossip from the music and dance world, giving all factions and points of view a hospitable forum in its pages.

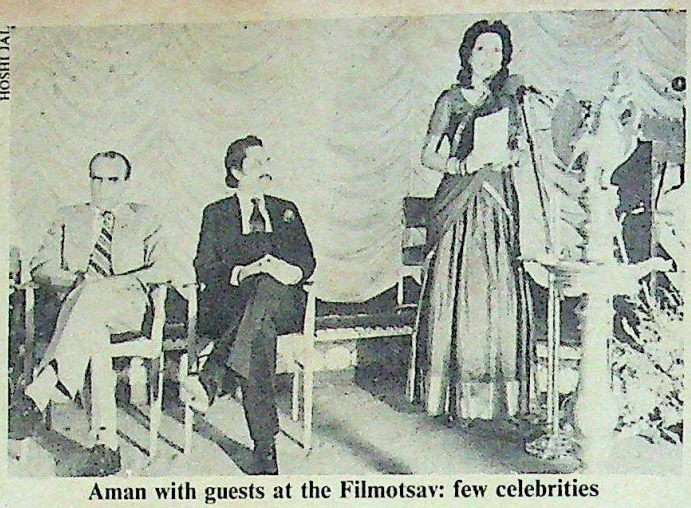
In the fiercely competitive world of Carnatic music and dance, the child prodigy makes the quickest money. Carnatic music has a near record of child prodigies who show a precocious grasp of laya and raga before they have quite left their cribs. Young Ravi Kiran plays the gottu vadyam, a fretless veena, and has just reached his teens. "A preternatural grasp of tonal acuity and rhythmic insight characterises his style," says Gopalakrishnan, sometime teacher and mentor of this musical *wunderkind*. He is obviously the reincarnation of his own grandfather, gottuvadyan maestro, Narayana Iyengar is the explanation that most satisfies people in this religious city.Music has come a long way since devadasis danced and music flourished under the patronage of kings. "While even now most people think twice before they take to a life exclusively devoted to music and dance," says dancer Aditi Narayanan, "once the leap is made there are few who turn back. The magic is too strong."

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Dattaraj and Dipti: showy affair



HOSHI JAL

Aman with guests at the Filmotsav: few celebrities

■ Wedding receptions for the rich and the famous have always been occasions for a show of the glittering moolah. But, they have rarely bordered on the ridiculous. Last fortnight high flying industrialist **Dhirubhai Ambani**, who was still in the arc lights after queries about his multi-million empire in Parliament and the press broke open, remained unfazed and made sure that whatever else, the marriage of his daughter **Dipti** to **Dattaraj Salgaocar**, son of a Goa-based shipping magnate, wouldn't be forgotten. Ambani hosted more than half a dozen pre-wedding bashes: the venue of these were provided to set the mood—the Brabourne Stadium for the traditional Gujarati ras dandia, the Taj Mahal Hotel's disco 1900s was hired for one swinging night and fire crackers were exploded which could be seen throughout Marine Drive, almost outrivalling the famous beating the retreat ceremony in New Delhi. And by all accounts, this is one splurge that neither Ambani nor the city's swingers will forget.

■ Instead of Filmotsav '84 it would have been more appropriately titled Filmostarve considering the lack of film celebrities who turned up for last fortnight's film festival in Bombay. The few foreign film personalities who did show up were comparatively unknown and their casual attire did little to liven up the proceedings. Even the local film industry chose to ignore the event, the one exception being the shapely presence of **Zeenat Aman** who stumbled through the opening ceremony as compere. Aman, however, had little support except from the well-populated Kapoor clan who turned out in full force to honour chief guest Raj Kapoor. But eventually, the show was stolen by the half-forgotten but well-preserved figure of ex-star Mumtaz who upstaged the lot and proved she had lost none of her allure.

■ Celebrity of the week: **Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis** who jetted in swiftly and silently last week on a visit so private that the US Embassy, Ministry of External Affairs and other official channels were all left agape. Though the wife of the assassinated US President and the late Greek shipping millionaire is known for her fanatic sense of privacy, this was no fly-by-night visit. She has been carefully planning a tour of India for several months, combining business, pleasure and family reunion. Jackie's long tour of India —she is expected to travel extensively—is partly to meet her son John Jr who is presently working in India. And more importantly the trip, insiders reveal, may yield a book to coincide with the festival of India in the US in 1985. She has been roped into the project by friends at New York's prestigious Asia Society, in particular art scholar Stuart Carey Welch.

■ Art seems to be imitating life with increasing regularity. The see-saw battle for the title of number one between **Amitabh Bachchan** and **Rajesh Khanna** took on an unreal bolism last fortnight with impending release of their screen offerings. Both been cast in similar roles tyros who enter politics and perience meteoric rises. themes of the films are pre as are the storylines and are remakes of succes Telugu and Kannada film add to the similarity, both were completed in the re time of less than a month are scheduled for concurrent lease. But it is really the re tive endings that acquire vance to the real-life battle supremacy. Khanna in *A MLA* portrays a barber enters politics and event becomes a state chief minis Bachchan in *Inquilaab* play unemployed graduate recru into politics who finally bo mes only a candidate for ch ministership. Whether that valid reflection of the cur state of the superstar struggl still a matter for conjecture

N. THIAGARAJAN



Jackie in Delhi: low key





Khanna (left) and Bachchan: star wars

SIGN POSTS

■ **Awarded:** Charles Co The Royal Gold Medal fo chitecture, one of the m prestigious international ar tectural accolades given by British Architects Insti Correa has been given award for his "design, ar tecture and originality".

■ **Died:** Surjit Singh, former captain of the Ind hockey team, in a car acci

CONTENTS
10 Voices
15 Indian
Curren
18 Punjab
20 J&K:
22 Mahar
29 West B
31 Orissa:
32 Bihar:
36 The O
41 Narcot
44 India/B
49 Gujara
51 Karnat
53 Delhi:
56 Sikkim
Investi
61 Bomba
66 Delhi:
Intervi
72 Benazi
Living
81 Tamil
Cover
82 The C
91 Trade
The Ec
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Busines
94 Escorts
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01 Diamo
04 IMF:
06 Hotels
06 The M
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08 Sri La
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Letter
16 China:
Perspe
State
Crime
24 Bihar:
27 Vijaya
28 Bomba
Special
30 State
The Ar
34 Asiatic
Environ
42 Karnat
Books
47 Erogen
Cinema
49 K. Bha
Sports
50 Footba
56 Eye-cat
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CONTENTS

10 **Voices**
15 **Indianotes**
Current Events
18 Punjab: The Sparring Sants
20 J&K: Mountain Warfare
22 Maharashtra: The Farmer's Fight
29 West Bengal: Aborted Offensive
31 Orissa: Timely Tour
32 Bihar: The Colliery Crackdown
36 The Opposition: Playing for Time
41 Narcotics: The Cochin Catch
44 India/Burma: Barter on the Border
49 Gujarat: Fighting Back
51 Karnataka: Confident Moves
53 Delhi: Coup de Club
56 Sikkim: Leadership Squabbles
Investigation
61 Bombay: The Plot Thickens
66 Delhi: The Land Pirates
Interview of the Fortnight
72 Benazir Bhutto: "The Persecution Continues"
Living
81 Tamil Nadu: Birth of a Dream
Cover Story
82 The Consumer Boom
91 **Trade Winds**
The Economy
92 Orwell and India: Economic Newspeak
Business
94 Escorts: Institutional Pressure
95 Jute Industry: Striking Out
101 Diamonds: Sparkling Success
104 IMF: Relinquishing the Loan
106 Hotels: Copy Writing
106 The Markets: Overreacting
Neighbours
108 Sri Lanka: Parleys of Peace
Globe-trotting
113 L. Subramaniam: Western Fortissimo
Letter from Washington
116 China: Two Track Policy
Perspective
120 State Governments: Strategy of Siege
Crime
124 Bihar: Readying for Revenge
127 Vijayawada: The Vanishing Trick
128 Bombay: The Hotel Deaths
Special Feature
130 State Governors: The Duel Role
The Arts
136 Asiatic Society: Neglected Heritage
Environment
142 Karnataka: Crumbling Court
Books
147 Erogenous Zones
Cinema
150 K. Bhagyaraj: Box-office Baron
Sports
154 Football: Star show
156 **Eye-catchers**

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Consumer Boom

The growth rate in the consumer industry has been phenomenal over the last couple of decades, unmatched by any other sector of the economy. The annual growth in demand of consumer goods varies from 10 to 20 per cent while economic growth has been a mere 5 per cent. Coupled with this, has been an amazing flood of consumer goods in the market from plastic toys to electronic goods. An in depth report.

Cover Story ● Page 82



Delhi

Local politicians, greedy colonisers and compliant bureaucrats working in collusion have turned land grabbing in Delhi into a roaring business. Over 250 acres of public land worth more than Rs 150 crore is in the hands of these ubiquitous officials and any attempt to demolish constructions on this land has resulted in grave consequences.

Investigation ● Page 66



Benazir Bhutto

The sudden release of Benazir Bhutto, from long years of detention has drawn considerable media attention. Now in London for an ear operation, Benazir is bristling with confidence, and all set for an assault on Pakistan's military regime. An exclusive interview on subjects ranging from the MRD, her detention and the controversial book she was supposed to have written.

Interview Of The Fortnight ● Page 72



Escorts

The controversial investments of Swraj Paul in Escorts and DCM still make headlines. The latest is the pressure on Escorts by the public sector finance institutions to register at least some of Paul's shares. They also demand that Escorts accept a fresh institutional nominee on their board of directors. All this has placed Escorts' Chairman H.P. Nanda in a delicate situation.

Business ● Page 94



Governors

Governors of many states are breaking the cardinal rules and provoking controversy by entering into the thick of everyday politics. A combination of several factors has brought on the changing role and functions of the governor. Today the men who occupy the Raj Bhavans are mostly superannuated politicians and party men unwilling to abandon their loyalties which causes a number of problems.

Special Feature ● Page 133



K. Bhagyaraj

A boisterous Tamil film, *Munthane Mudichu*, expected to net in Rs 4 crore, is breaking box office records in the south. And a hotter property than the film is its hero, writer and director K. Bhagyaraj, who has shot to instant stardom, replacing a few of the established actors in Madras' film industry. With his varied talents, Bhagyaraj is now dubbed as a one-man industry. A profile.

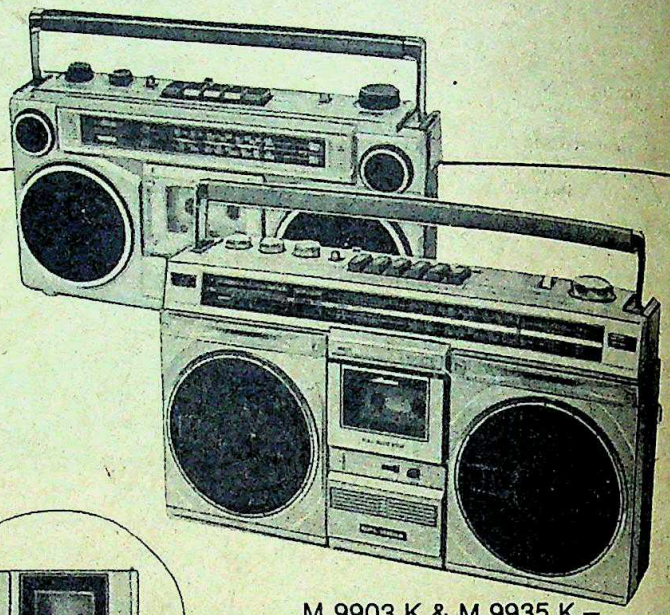
Cinema ● Page 150

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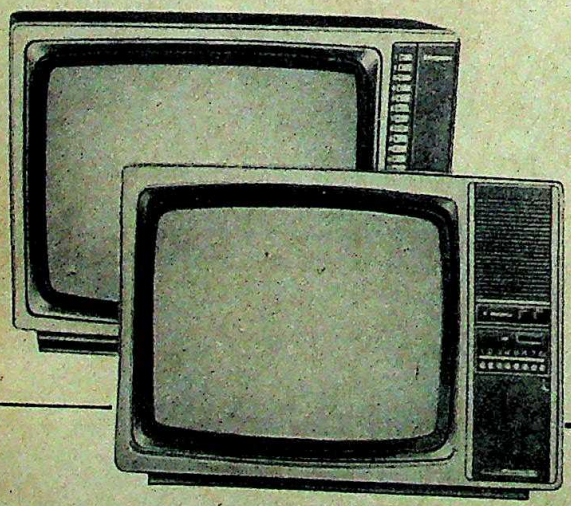
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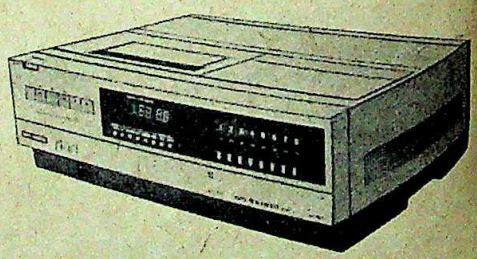
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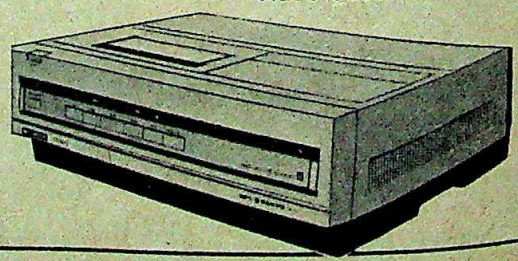
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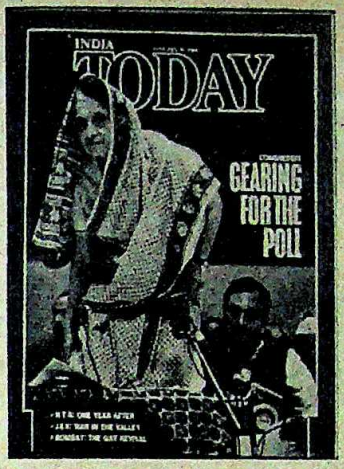
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CONGRESS COVERAGE

Kudos for 'covering' the 77th plenary session of the Congress party (Cover Story, January 31). I think your colour photographs probably helped Mrs Gandhi more than the water-coloured posters as far as the publicity is concerned.

Ahmedabad *Ketan Yagnik*

BACKLASH

You have rightly pointed out in the Letter from the Editor (January 31) that "anti-national" has become an often repeated cliché in Mrs Gandhi's speeches. In her retort against Sumit Mitra she admitted that she had read INDIA TODAY when it is known that Mrs Gandhi does not read newspapers and magazines. This should be a matter of pride for you.

Delhi *Romi S. Goga*

■ I find Mrs Gandhi's outburst against the magazine difficult to understand. In spite of her hysterical behaviour you have played it fair by putting her on the cover.

Bombay *Surendra Kanstiya*

■ A responsible journal like yours should be far more concerned about the blatant evasions of Mrs Gandhi in her press conferences than with wounded pride. The only reason she gets away with this kind of behaviour is the complete lack of follow up questions. I think if two other correspondents had reframed Mitra's question and put it to her she would have been forced to answer.

Unfortunately solidarity among this well-entrenched institution is as great as amongst our politicians. So, Mrs Gandhi gets away and seems to be an adroit handler of the media.

Bombay *Harsh A. Desai*

■ In attempting to justify Sumit Mitra's query at the press conference at Calcutta you are trying to defend the indefensible. Mitra's question was clearly perverse. Sometimes those who sow the wind reap a whirlwind. In this case Mitra did both.

Madras *M.S. Nair*

■ You have described Mrs Gandhi's outburst against Sumit Mitra as hysterical. I have been a victim of Mrs Gandhi's psychotic behaviour at two national press conferences. On the first occasion I wanted to know why she was attacking the Opposition for their peaceful agitations and reminded her that when she was in the Opposition, she had often said that the Opposition had the right to remove the Government of the day through constitutional means. "I didn't say any such thing," she burst out. I pointed out that the two news agencies and all the leading newspapers had reported her statement. She refused to entertain any supplementaries from me and went on to the next question.

The second occasion was more revealing. At her last national press conference a few months ago, I asked her what was being done to improve the credibility of All India Radio and Doordarshan which were under total political and bureaucratic control. She became livid with rage and in a trembling voice retorted: "What is your credibility?" Then, she launched an attack on the entire press in much the same language used in "answering" Mitra's very pertinent question at her press conference.

I do not know about the others but I have come to the conclusion that there is no point in attending Mrs Gandhi's press conferences. There is no particular pleasure in being abused by the prime minister of India. I think she will be happier at home in the company of fawning Indian and admiring western correspondents.

New Delhi *K.R. Sundar Rajan*

HEATED ISSUE

Your article "Milk on the Boil" (January 31) does not fully highlight the shortcomings of Operation Flood II. Instead of making sincere efforts for increasing the production of milk, imaginary success is being claimed by putting forward distorted data. You should do a more detailed study of the whole issue.

New Delhi *Dr S.P. Aggarwal*

■ Why are you making such a hoo-ha about reconstituted milk under Operation Flood? This is a part of the approved scheme, it is the money realised from the sales of gifted milk powder and butter oil that funds the project. As long as the quantities of milk powder and butter oil used are within the project estimates, it means that everything is working out as planned. The alarm bells are false.

Bombay *Deepika Joshi*

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Sunny Dons Binny



"I had always wanted a brown suit. Binny's have given me one. It is very good"

— said Sunil Gavaskar at the conclusion of the India-West Indies Series 1983, in Madras.

Sunil won the Man of the Match Award and the Silver Trophy, presented by Binny's.

It was Sunil's match. A world record of 30 Test centuries; and the highest individual scorer for India.

BINNY

polyester blends

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■ The article is a bitter scathing attack on
e man who has probably devoted his life
the cause. It is a pity that his detractors
ve chosen to condemn his methods and
iled to appreciate his initiative. He has at
ast made an attempt to better the lives of
e rural households.

Rajiv Handa
elhi

HANGE OF SCENE

On reading the report "Conversions:
e Gulf Stream" (January 31) one gets the
pression that the Harijans change their
ligion primarily because of material bene-
s and that only these converted Harijans
et jobs in the Gulf. This is not true. The
arijans change their religion because they
ain a higher status in a society that would
en treat them as equals. After that only
me of them get jobs in the Gulf. There are
parently more Hindus than Muslims from
dia working in the Gulf.

Bashir-ul-Haq
ammu

ATE REALISATION

In his guest column ("Melodious Met-
polis", January 31), Raghava Menon has
oted my great granduncle Dr B.V. Keskar
d referred to him as "the late". I'm afraid
r Keskar, though an octogenarian, is very
uch alive and lives in Delhi.

Charusheela Sohoni
ombay

e apologise for the error and wish Dr
kar a long life.

—Editor

D STUFF

You should have done more justice to
r cover story on children, and their
inions from India's innumerable towns;
for that matter children from Assam,
anipur, Tripura, Nagaland, Sikkim,
unachal Pradesh, Andaman and Nico-
r...were not 'intercine'. Why should
always be Bombay, Madras, Delhi,
lcutta, Bangalore, etc.?

M. Vasanti
gpur

Kudos to your fascinating and enlight-
g cover story. Poverty creates such a
ng impact on a poor family that parents
e forced to put their minor wards for
ployment. Moreover lack of dedication,
ality and sincerity amongst schoolteachers
e made the children indisciplined and
fferent. Children are never born bad
the circumstances and the environment
es them to indulge in evils like gambling,
king and pickpocketing. Transforming
as child-labour, ruffians is really
ful for the country's prosperity.

B.N. Bose
kshedpur

Talking about children, last month I
ed a general knowledge test for the
students from our rural school. The results were so astonishing, and I admit that they are more knowledgeable than I was at the age of 14. So the comments that I thought were too mature from the children, published in your article are now fully justified.

Tenkari *T.R. Venkat Rammanan*

■ I was really moved after reading about the plight of the millions of poor, weak, illiterate children. Isn't it surprising that even after 36 years of Independence the standard of living of our children has remained the same, or has gone down. We are able to send satellites and men into space but cannot send our children to school, can spread lavish banquets for the delegates of NAM and CHOGM but cannot afford a simple daily meal for our young ones. It seems that the Government's slogan for the Year of the Child "Happy Child—Nation's Pride" was just an eyewash. No one really takes the children seriously.

Bombay *Quaid Z. Najmi*

■ Your cover story on the children was perhaps the naivest seen from you in a long time. There are plenty of pressing issues around so you didn't have to slap together a story full of vague rambling ideas and emotions from kids, who I am sure will outgrow them before long. They clearly show signs of growing cynicism about Indian life in general that seem to suggest a falling-in of sorts is already on. As a teenager myself I can tell you that I felt the same not long ago but my feelings have considerably dimmed since.

Madras *P. Suresh*

■ The cover story on children has clearly picturised the minds of our future generation whom we often underestimate as being immature and playful. It was a good opportunity to know their ideas about the country. Their statements reveal their innocence and their guts to speak out.

Madras *Kamala S.*

PLAYING FAIR

I strongly object to Dicky Rutnagur's article "Failing the Tests" (January 15), in which he calls India's World Cup victory "a colossal fluke". I agree that India was totally outclassed by the West Indies in the recently concluded series, but this is not an uncommon occurrence among teams which become world champions. Take, for instance, the case of the Italian football team. After winning the World Cup they couldn't even qualify for the European Championships, losing to a number of teams of much lesser repute. But does anyone refer to their victory as a colossal fluke?

Calcutta *Dipak Chandy*

■ Why is it that Dicky Rutnagur puts the entire blame on Gavaskar for the debacle at Calcutta? There are 10 other players. What are they doing? Why should they bat irresponsibly and get away with it? If Gavaskar should be dropped for playing a couple of bad shots then I think the entire team should be dropped. If India has won two significant matches in the absence of Gavaskar then I would like to remind Dicky Rutnagur that India has won and saved many matches only because of Gavaskar.

New Delhi *Ranjana Ramachandran*

■ After the cloying, sycophantic drivel in the national press about India's "Little Don" Gavaskar, it is refreshing to see Indian cricket placed in perspective by Rutnagur.

Hong Kong *Vernon Ram*

■ It appears that the writer intended to make Gavaskar the target of criticism under the garb of summing up the recently concluded India-West Indies series. It gives the impression that Gavaskar was solely responsible for losing the series. The writer while being critical about the board's attitude towards Gavaskar would like to drop him after the Calcutta Test and recollects the Indian victories in Gavaskar's absence. It is like saying that Richards' overconfidence in the crucial final cost the West Indies the World Cup, so drop Richards from the one-day matches.

Hyderabad *K.V. Srinivas*

■ It is immature of a journalist of Dicky Rutnagur's standing to write such petty comments airing his personal bias about Gavaskar. How could he overlook the fundamental of cricket—a game of chance—or is it that he happens to be a journalist by chance?

Rajasthan *Dhiraj Tyagi*

■ There are journalists like Dicky Rutnagur who infect Indian sports. I would recommend a statutory warning, on such reports, reading "This article can be injurious to Indian cricket".

Brighton, UK *Dr S.M. Shivaprasad*

POLITICAL PARADOX

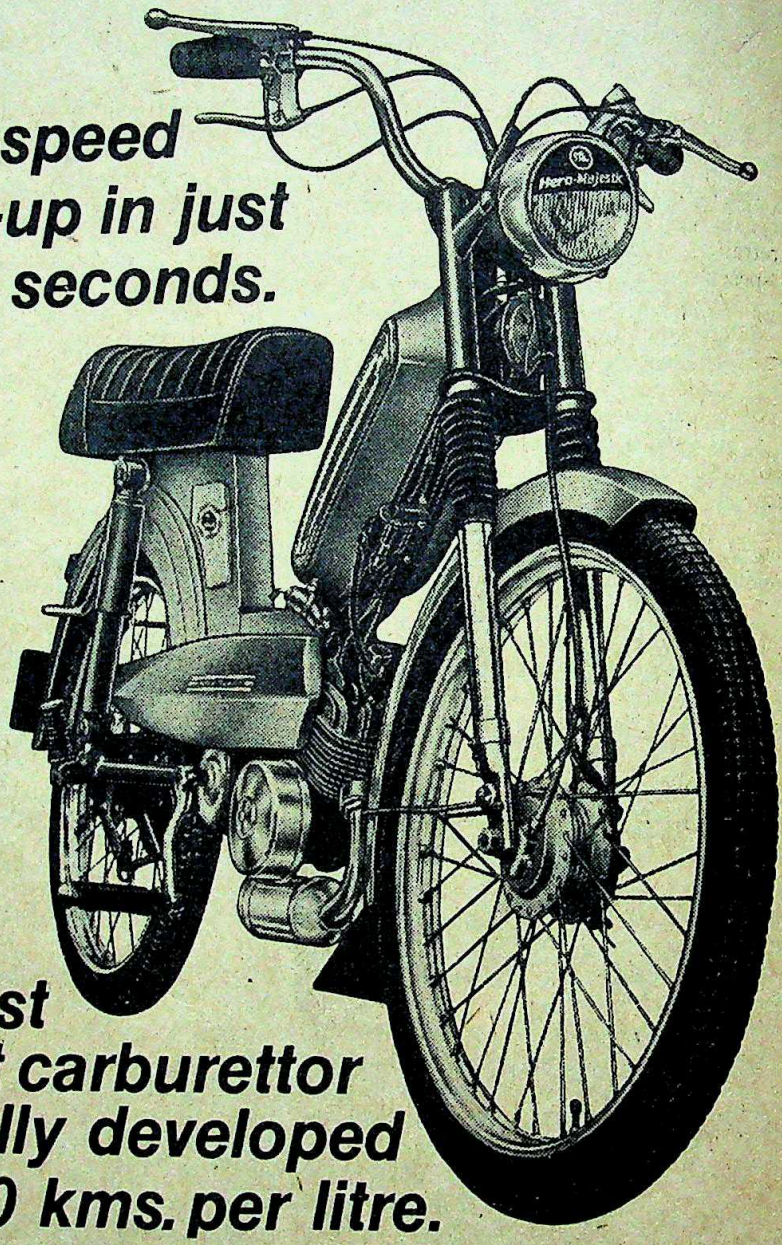
The INDIA TODAY-MARG opinion poll ("Political Pointers", January 15) shows that Mrs Gandhi continues to be very popular as the prime minister but that most people think that things are going badly for the country. Shouldn't your next poll try to get to the bottom of this apparent paradox? Do people really think that the prime minister has nothing to do with the way things are going for the country or is that they really believe the "foreign hand" story?

Bombay *B.J. D'Silva*

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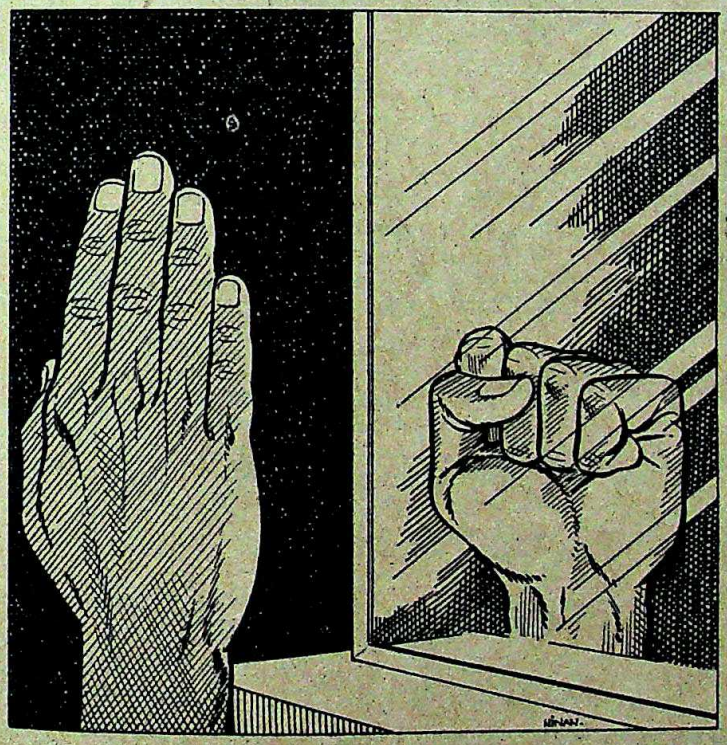
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INDIA TODAY
THE COMPLETE NEWSMAGAZINE

Street Politics

THERE are few things that Mrs Indira Gandhi seems to cherish more than the image of being a dedicated democrat. The refrain runs subtly, and sometimes not so subtly, through her speeches and interviews. She never tires, for example, of reminding those who quiz her on the subject of her Emergency eight years ago that it was she, after all, who ordered the March 1977 elections and unlike so many despots around the world, actually walked out of office when the verdict went against her party. But such protestations don't wear well with the current antics of her party which has resorted to street politics against its foes with great alacrity in recent times.

With the exception of groups like the Akali Dal and the Assam student bodies, which believe that they are fighting for a religious cause or social justice and not for political power, or the Marxists, who decline to banish violence from their rule book, there was otherwise a welcome trend away from street politics. What the Congress(I)'s roving bands in the valley of Kashmir and Calcutta have done in recent days goes far beyond the injuries and deaths that resulted. It is a kind of political tactic that this country can well do without.



When politically backed hoodlums take to the streets they accomplish several things their party leaders would be loath to acknowledge. First, they reduce politics to the level of street brawls which can only bring them into contempt. Manhandling politicians, as Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah was manhandled in Calcutta at the time of the Opposition conclave last month, is hooliganism which should be condemned in the strongest terms.

Second, they show up some appalling double standards. The Congress(I) has chosen to trumpet a view that all that the Opposition wants is to displace it at any cost. Yet, by taking to the streets in Jammu & Kashmir and West Bengal, and seeking to bring down the Karnataka Government by allegedly paying cash, the ruling party shows itself possessed by the same disease of which it accuses the Opposition, and in a more virulent form.

Third, they show themselves to be people trying to steal in through the back door after they were firmly repulsed at the main entrance. The governments in these states are legitimately elected and with as much constitutional underpinning as any of the numerous Congress(I) governments in the states. It is their right to serve their full terms free from interference and intervention, just as clearly as it is the right of any Congress(I) administration, at the state or Central level.

Fourth, they show up the weakness of their own case. This is a country where the laws of the land still operate and if there are anti-national activities in Jammu & Kashmir or in any other part of the country, there is no shortage of laws with which to deal with them. If the Congress(I) believes that the way out is to take the law into its own hands, it is wide off the mark.

And, lastly, they demonstrate an ignorance or an unwillingness to accept the political reality of today, that the era is over—if only for the time being—of one party's exclusive dominance which characterised politics from Independence to 1967 and then again during the '70s before the end of the Emergency. The Congress(I), in a word, has to learn to live with the Opposition.

THIS is the real significance of the opposition governments, now in office in some states and why they must be allowed to function unmolested. Though times have changed, the political scene today is not unlike that which followed the 1967 elections, with a shaky Congress regime in New Delhi and seven states ruled by opposition parties. Then, the opposition regimes were dominated by parties which had national aspirations. Today, the most effective regional governments are those of regional groupings or parties with national pretensions.

The 1967 distribution of political power changed dramatically with Mrs Gandhi's split of the Congress and the powerful wave of popularity which followed in its wake and after the 1971 war with Pakistan. Today, there is no escape from certain realities, that some states will continue to return opposition parties to power and that state politics is likely to evolve into a chequered quilt of Congress(I), opposition and coalition regimes.

Nobody can predict the outcome of the next general elections. In the last three polls, the electorate has swept the Congress(I) convincingly to power on two occasions and humiliatingly out of office once. Even if the Congress(I) returns to power it will have to contend with opposition governments in the states. If democracy is to function there should be no assault on these whether through the power of money or the politics of streets. To do so would undermine the foundations of democracy.

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PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

	1982-83	*1983-84 (estimated)*	*(+) % increase*
Buffer Stocks (lakh tonnes)	43.7	71.3	63.3
Operational Stocks (lakh tonnes)	46.4	51.0	9.9
Total Purchases (lakh tonnes)	182.6	198.1	8.5
Total Sales (lakh tonnes)	159.1	180.1	13.7
Total Purchase & Sales (lakh tonnes)	341.7	378.2	10.7
Total Turnover (Rs. Crores)	6935.0	8133.0	17.3
Total Storage Capacity (lakh tonnes)	181.4	195.2	7.6
Capacity Utilisation of Storage Space (Peak)	73.5%	85%	15.6%
Staff Cost as % of Turnover	1.6	1.5	(-) 4.5

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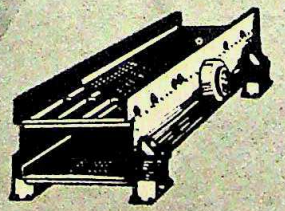


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» A corrupt man cannot afford to antagonise—or fight—the press. I did both.
—*Jagannath Mishra in* Weekend Review

» We want to rule over the whole of India, the world. We do not want to fight for territory. We want the Sikhs to fill the seats of power everywhere.
—*Bibi Amarjit Kaur, militant Sikh leader quoted in* Current

» In Assam you do not get anything till you agitate.
—*Nurul Hussain, former vice-president of* AASU *in* Indian Express

» No opposition ever frightens me—whether they use guns or lathis, it does not frighten me in the least. I repeat: Nothing ever scares me.
—*Maneka Gandhi in* Gentleman

» Some will say that the mode and grade (of Rajiv Gandhi's second class rail travel) are entirely befitting the subject's talent and true status.
—*Editorial comment in* The Statesman

» Today's governors function as the Congress(I)'s agents and messenger boys. If there are exceptions, they deserve wide publicity.
—*K.R. Sundar Rajan in* The Sunday Observer

» Of all the world leaders Mrs Gandhi is possibly the most popular in Pakistan...when it comes to Pakistan, no one has the guts to speak up except Mrs Gandhi.
—*Tariq Ali in* The Illustrated Weekly of India

» Ten strokes in a rich colour scheme does not necessarily imply modern art...Today 99 per cent of the painters copy the West and call their copies modern art; no one knows the meaning of creation, leave alone modern art!
—*Franois Souza in* Society

» I have done all the shouting and hope that some day the Government will take notice of it.
—*Michael Ferreira in* Sportsweek



I have just pasted a picture there saving myself the bother of switching it on

» I still believe that Bengalis have more going for them than other Indians and that women have the longest, loveliest hair and the largest, loveliest eyes. But I cannot understand why they have Calcutta.
—*Khushwant Singh in* The Hindustan Times

» I intend continuing as a bachelor girl right through '84 and '85. I see no reason why I shouldn't continue working hard.
—*Zeenat Aman in* Eve's Weekly

» Commercial cinema has made us embarrassed about heroism. In itself there is nothing wrong with it.
—*Govind Nihalani in* Sunday

» In the Holy Book of Film Censors there is one law which applies to ministers, bureaucrats and sundry officials who are above and beyond the call of sex. And there is another law for the sex-starved masses who have shown... an unhealthy tendency... to see "hot" films.
—*B.K. Karanjia in* Screen

» There can never be another figure in my life to whom I will ever be subservient, whom I will allow to influence me. Today MGR is everything to me.
—*Jayalalitha in* The Week

» I demolished Morarji Desai three times; in those days people called my writing yellow journalism, today Arun Shourie attacks and humbles a small fish like Antulay and he gets international awards.
—*R.K. Karanjia in* Femina

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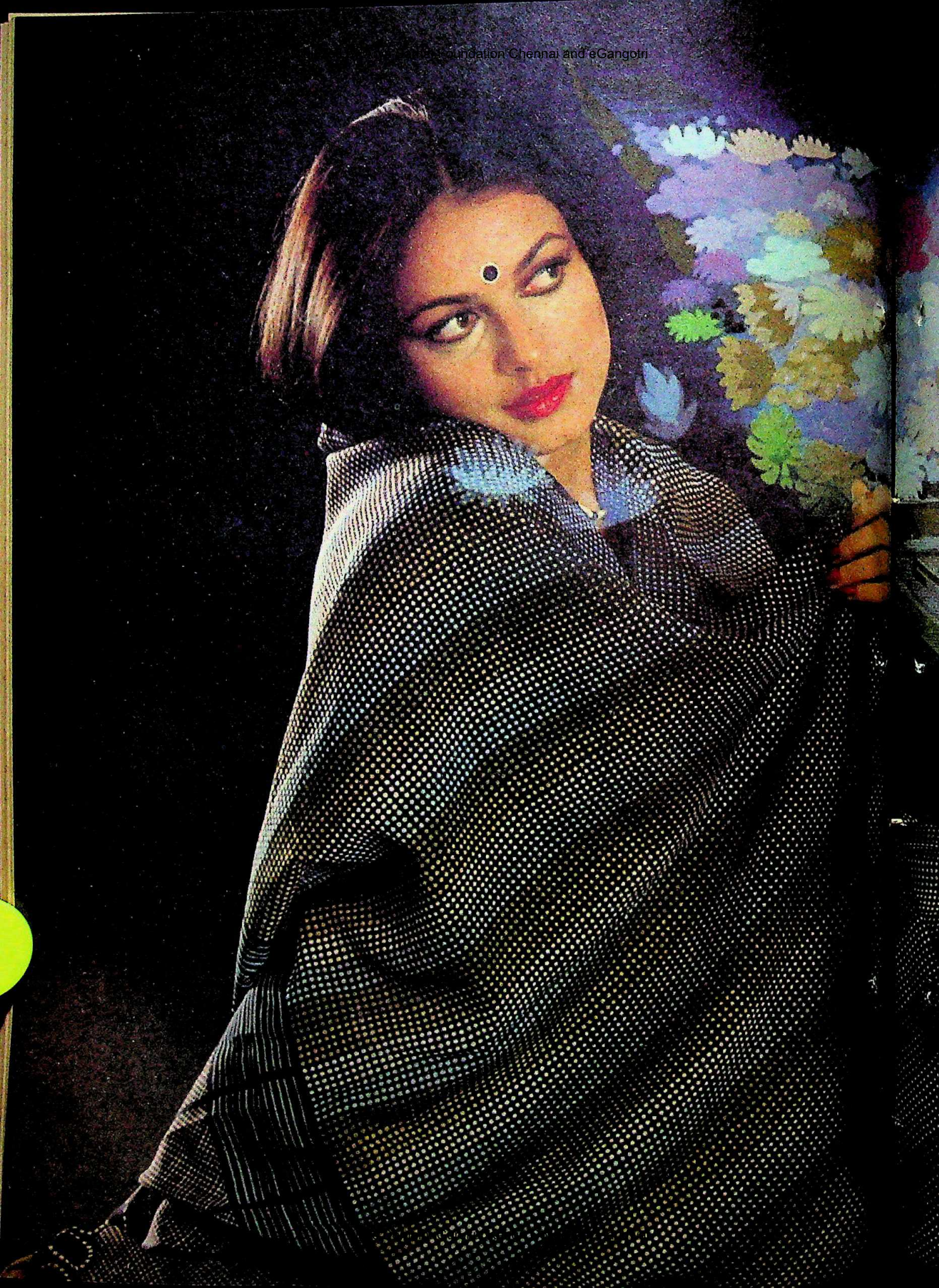


AIR-INDIA CARGO

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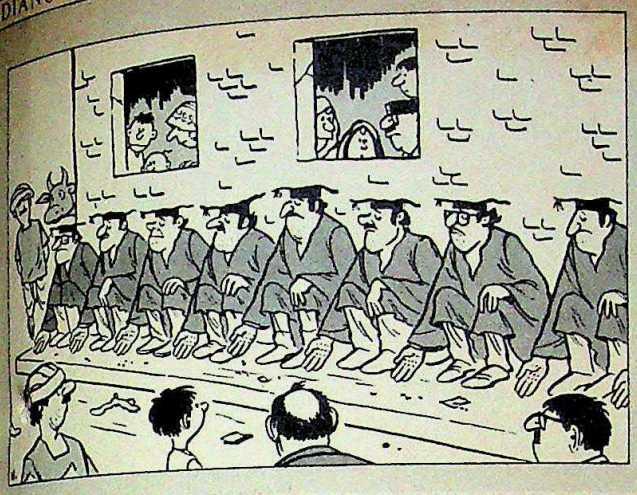



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PALM-HISTORY

■ Finding jobs these days is no easy job: it is the usual story of too many people chasing too few jobs. The problem is as acute in Udaipur as anywhere else. Eleven unemployed young men there, fresh from university with armloads of more or less useless degrees, hawked themselves all over the place until their soles were blue in the face, and settled on a different sales pitch.

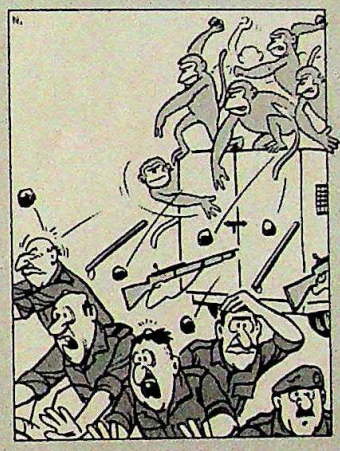
They first cleaned their hands with great care. After this, they wrote down, in the neatest letters possible, every one of their degrees and qualifications on the palms of their hands. Then they set out for their "begging week", and the first day's round included almost all the senior government officials as well as the vice-chancellor and the MP from Udaipur. What these gentlemen thought of 22 upturned palms beseeching them for jobs is not on record, but the odyssey will continue.

MONKEY TALES

■ No community is worth the name until it can take care of its young, whether by reading Spock's *Baby and Child Care* or, say, by besieging a houseful of policemen. Some monkeys opted for the easier method recently in Calcutta.

A baby monkey wandered into a thana, saw a prison van parked in the yard and went nosing inside, enticed by the fragrance of potatoes. As it was tucking into them, a policeman slipped up unnoticed and shut the door of the van. Immediately, potatoes and monkey started leaping and hollering inside, drawing a huge gang of monkeys to the spot. The leader took his post on top of the van, and the others placed themselves at other strategic points, notably the entrance.

Then a policeman hit the leader with a stone and ran for cover from the hail of stones



he received in reply. The monkeys did not flinch even when their opponents went for them with lathis and guns —used as clubs.

Eventually, somebody did what should have been done in the first place: he cautiously opened the door of the van. The baby bounced out, Hanuman called his brigades together and the entire army withdrew victoriously, leaving the police nursing their bruises and ego.

EASY COME EASY GO

■ Very, very few of the thousands who flap their palms under the table in the hope that something crisp will eventually drop into it have ever been caught. But there exist a number of unhappy souls who were not able to transfer the take to their pockets. Among them is a doctor in the government hospital in Madikere, Karnataka.



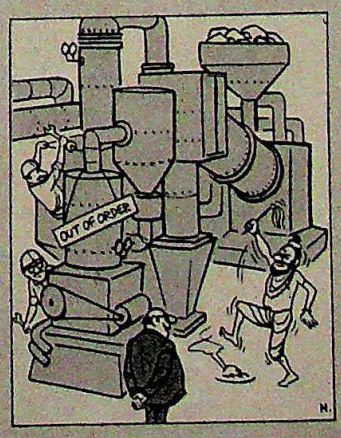
Government hospitals being what they are, it was not surprising that the doctor tried to cash in on a handicapped person's plea for a medical certificate. The price he asked was Rs 50. The money had hardly changed hands when a group of large men hove into sight. Quick as a nurse when she takes a blood sample, the medico realised that the game was up and swallowed the notes. All that the vigilance men saw when they got close enough was an Adam's apple triumphantly bobbing up and down.

Set a thief to catch a thief; the vigilance men got hold of the district surgeon who promptly did something —punched him in the stomach, maybe—and in a nauseating odour of half-digested dosa and sambar the notes flopped limply to the ground. Corruption always stinks.

TANTRIC TACTICS

■ Tantrics are favoured persons today—they can get anything done, from ensuring the victory of a candidate in the elections to helping a businessman get the better of others in cutthroat competition. Now, it seems, they are taking over as repairmen, going by this story from a cement plant in Bilaspur district of Madhya Pradesh.

The factory had shut down for three weeks because most of its machines had broken down. The management apparently decided to go in for something trendier than oil and wrenches: it enlisted the services of a tantric from Karnataka. The man came, mumbo-jumboed and advised the manager to hang a lemon on each of the machines that were kaput. This was duly done. Meanwhile, the factory



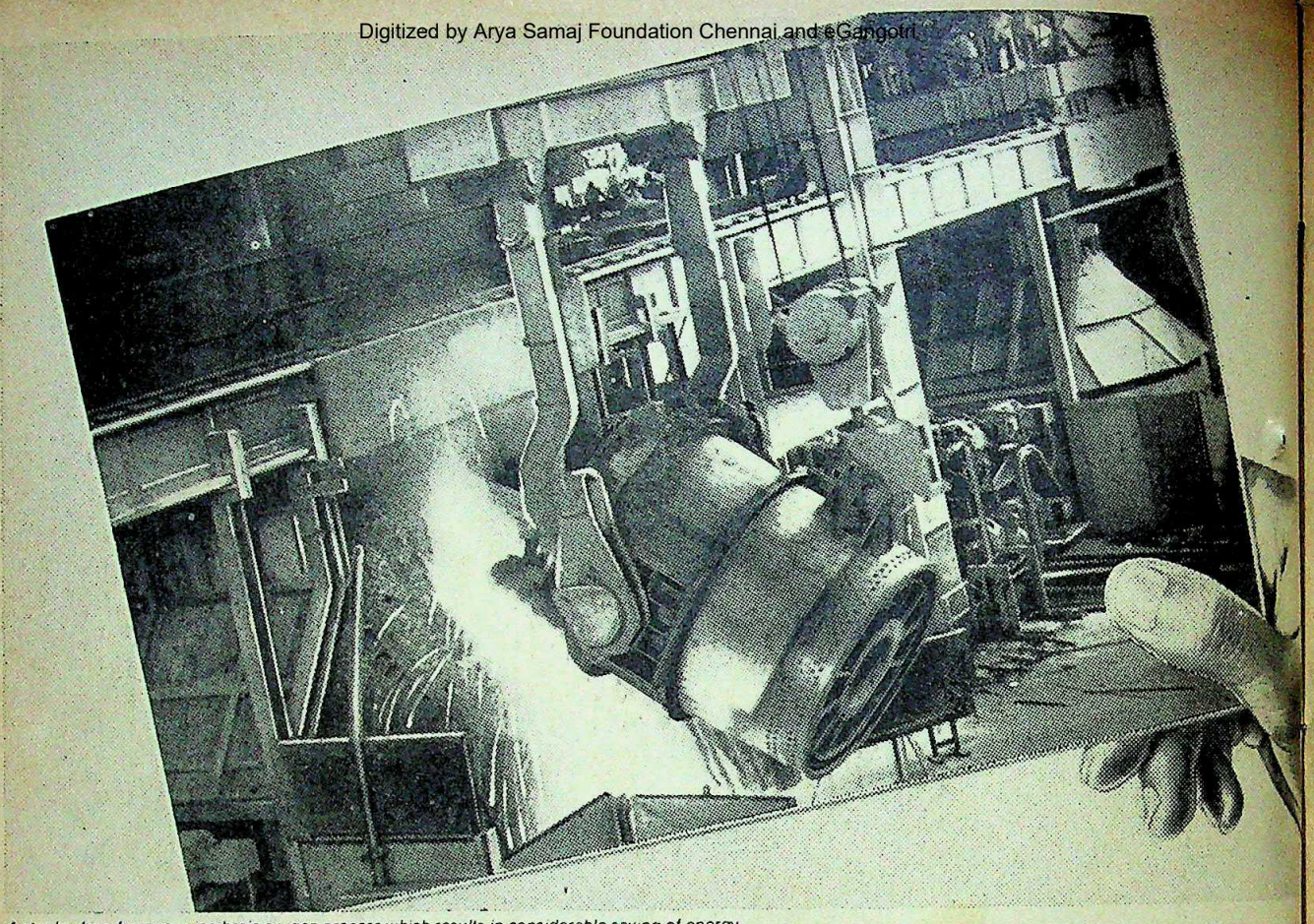
mechanics discovered what had gone wrong and started things up again. Thank you very much, said the management to the tantric, who received a handsome fee.

Unimpressed by this display of eastern learning, the plant union is protesting against the "unscientific" attitude of the management. Perhaps the tantric will now solve other problems, those of irritating unions, for instance.

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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PUNJAB

The Sparring Sants

THE PERPETUALLY simmering cauldron of Sikh politics boiled over last fortnight. Excitement had risen to a high pitch as the Akali leaders sat debating indecisively for three days on the shape of the "revolutionary" phase of their agitation. But at the end of the long wait, the action was all on the wrong side, at least from the Akali point of view. Amid speculation of total non-cooperation, a week-long Punjab bandh and a call to the farmers to deposit land revenue at the Akal Takht, the diluted action programme that morcha dictator Sant Harchand Singh Longowal announced to newsmen on January 27 certainly came as a surprise.

Yet if his party's self-professed "do-or-die" agitation began with a whimper, the bang did not take long coming. A day's Punjab bandh on February 8 and a demand for a constitutional amendment re-defining the Sikhs as a faith separate from Hinduism could hardly have been expected to satisfy the thousands who had been gathering in the Golden Temple precincts for over three days. As the two-point programme was announced to them they flew into a rage.

Violent Protest: There were slogans of "Longowal *murdabad*" and worse, of the unprintable variety. "What can you expect from a leadership of eunuchs," shouted Kabal Singh, a student from Tarn Taran before yelling out another slogan in favour of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. A number of slogan-shouting men, mostly students belonging to All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF), the pro-Bhindranwale student wing of the Akali Dal, tried to scale the walls of Teja Singh Samundari Hall, Longowal's abode and the headquarters of Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). Worse followed with youths waving unsheathed kirpans and firing shots in the air. All along, Bhindranwale's key lieutenants watched the proceedings from the terrace of the nearby Guru Ram Das Sahib langar building.

But the delight on their faces vanished as a nearly hundred-strong gang of armed men. suddenly emerged out of the Teja Singh Samundari Hall, shouting pro-Longowal slogans and challenging the demonstrators. In the brief scuffle that broke out, two demonstrators were seen being taken out with bleeding stab wounds. But action ended almost as suddenly as it had begun when Bhindranwale—who had so far been sleeping all rolled up in his velvet quilt in the Akal Takht—suddenly emerged on the scene with an amplifier, appealing for peace. Longowal withdrew his storm-troopers, their objective of keeping the rivals at bay already achieved.

Tenuous Peace: The peace the two sants had achieved was a fragile one, however, for tension still simmered in both camps. While Bhindranwale's men menacingly cleaned their firearms on the terrace overlooking the temple and openly canvassed for a change in the party leadership, a tenacious Longowal went into a huddle with his key supporters. Confessed one later: "We had expected adverse reaction, but nothing of this variety. We were momentarily caught unawares." Said Bhindranwale: "I don't say whether there are differences or not. But I do not approve of slogan-shouting against each other."

If the sudden outburst of factional [illegible] built up over the months put reconciliation efforts in reverse gear, it had also, for the first time, brought the fight between the moderates and the extremists in the open. As admitted an Akali leader: "We really have nothing left to hide now."

But the way the confrontation had built up over the last few months, the show-down had become inevitable. It began in September last year when Bhindranwale, irked

SHEKHAR GUPTA



Sandhu holds aloft a copy of the Khalistan constitution: jubilant mood

Longowal's pacifist approach decided to call a meeting of "all clean-hearted Sikhs" where a call was given for a parallel government.

While differences continued to show, various developments like the Bhindranwale group's confrontation with the alleged pro-Longowal Babbar Khalsa men and their retreat to the safer confines of the Akal Takht, matters really came to a head in

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series of incidents during the last few weeks.

Counter-Moves: Most prominent among them was Longowal's rather transparent stratagem in calling a meeting of the Akali Dal Youth Wing, constituted in March last year, to counter the challenge of the AISSF. But the AISSF had anticipated the move well. Just as the Youth Wing men gathered in the temple precincts, unidentified men went round distributing unsigned pamphlets accusing Longowal, Prakash Singh Badal and others of selling out Sikh interests. The pamphlet which immediately





Crowds outside Longowal's office after the announcement of the agitation programme (top) and a Khalistan "currency" note: stormy scenes

raised a stir, alleged among other things that:

- Badal had secret meetings with Rajiv Gandhi and Mrs Gandhi at Moscow and New York respectively;
- the pro-Longowal elements conspired with Babbar Khalsa to force Bhindranwale into leaving the Guru Nanak Niwas;
- Badal committed sacrilege by launching a kisan morcha all on his own, independent of the Akali Dal's "dharam yudh morcha";
- Longowal and his supporters conspired to get Ranjit Singh, the main accused in the Nirankari baba murder case, arrested.

An enraged Longowal immediately reacted by telling the gathering—said to be about as large as the AISSF show in September last year—that Congress(I) elements were responsible for the distribution of the pamphlet. The Bhindranwale camp read it in the context of the charges openly levelled by some Longowal camp followers like former revenue minister Jiwan Singh Umranangal and Harchand Singh Fattanwalla that Bhindranwale is a Congress(I) agent. The schism became complete as anti-Longowal elements cleverly planted on the news agencies the story that the Akali Dal president was about to dissolve the AISSF, from which Bhindranwale draws most of his strength. Reacting violently, AISSF President Bhai Amrik Singh said: "We have been the Akali Dal's storm-troopers in every battle of the faith. But the federation is no individual's carbon copy and no individual can disband it."

Turning Point: Longowal keeps quiet on the issue, though the whole Youth Wing build-up is directed towards precisely this end. But while all eyes are now on the activities of the AISSF the real turning point in the temple politics has been the arrest of Ranjit Singh. Explained a Longowal supporter: "Ranjit Singh's arrest shattered Bhindranwale who is looked upon as a hero among the Sikhs mainly because they think he got the Nirankari baba killed. Nothing could be more damaging to his image than the insinuation that Ranjit Singh surrendered because of his disillusionment with Bhindranwale."

That Ranjit Singh surrendered to the CBI is now common knowledge inside the temple. He had apparently been shaken by the sudden murder of Gian Singh, one of the fellow-suspects in the Nirankari baba case, and the discovery of other bodies in the gutters behind the Guru Nanak Niwas. Insiders say Ranjit Singh knew the identity of the dead and feared that since he was not in the inner circle of any faction he too could meet the same fate. The walls inside the temple complex are now plastered with posters on behalf of all the groups carrying Ranjit Singh's picture and demanding action against "traitors" who had him arrested. Ranjit Singh's arrest is a rallying point common to both Bhindranwale and Longowal whose supporters lay the blame at each other's doors.

THEY could not, however, have bargained for the kind of violence that took place on January 27 and which, on the face of it, seemed to strengthen the hands of only the hard-liners. In fact as hordes of men ran around the temple complex, the only cheerful person was Balbir Singh Sandhu, the self-styled secretary-general of the banned "National Council Of Khalistan" who has been banking on exactly such a prospect. Said he a day before the violence: "People who trusted the Akalis with their fate are getting impatient. Unless the party leadership does something really action-oriented now it will be thrown out and a better one chosen." It is no secret that his idea of "better" people is Bhindranwale and his brood. Often, as the battle continued, Sandhu was seen rushing up and down the stairs of the Guru Ram Das Sahib langar building where Bhindranwale holds court in the day. Khalistan slogans were openly shouted in the building.

For him and other secessionist elements, the crisis could not have come at a more opportune time. Just a day earlier, on the afternoon of Republic Day, Sandhu had held a little show of his own on the terrace of the Guru Nanak Niwas, unfurling the Khalistan flag and released hand-written, xeroxed copies of what he claimed was its "constitution". Youths accompanying him, who could be easily identified as members of Bhindranwale's regular entourage freely fired .303 rifle shots in the air in celebration.

Extreme Stance: Making no secret of his dislike for the Longowal group, Sandhu charged the Akalis with pussyfooting on the "real issue of Khalistan". Said he: "If the Akalis do not have the courage to talk directly of Khalistan they should at least

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launch a campaign for a parallel government as Jagdev Singh Talwandi had demanded." Amidst calls for an armed struggle "against Hindu imperialism" and rejection of the Indian Constitution "which has only spread debauchery and confusion", Sandhu announced the boundaries of his "Republic of Khalistan", run by "a presidential form of government advised by a 120-member senate". Said he: "Our fight is now only with India." Later, Bhindranwale was seen distributing bananas brought to him by Sandhu's men to mark the occasion.

While Bhindranwale himself stayed silent on the question of Khalistan, his key lieutenants, former education minister Sukhjinder Singh and former editor of *Akali Patrika* Bharpur Singh Balbir were less restrained. Said Balbir: "What is the point in Longowal threatening to disown the Indian Constitution now? The Sikhs had disowned it in 1950. We had, in fact, put down our dissent in writing at that time."

Convenient Development: But while the rift encouraged the secessionists it also pleased the Congress(I) leadership and bureaucrats managing Punjab affairs in Delhi. Congress(I) leaders were already claiming success for their efforts to split the Akali Dal and the agitation, and other similar Sikh agitations in the past destroyed by internal discord. Said an official: "This is what Mrs Gandhi should have been waiting for. But if she tries to take it too far, the tactic could boomerang."

On present reckoning, the best chance for the Government lies in seeking an agreement with the moderates who, pushed to the wall by the extremists, would certainly appreciate a face-saving getaway. But if Mrs Gandhi does not grab the opportunity it will only tilt the scales decisively in favour of the hardliners. Asked Badal exasperatedly: "What could be on Mrs Gandhi's mind? Why doesn't she do something?" Added former finance minister and moderate Akali ideologue Balwant Singh: "One person's obstinacy is holding the country to ransom".

But even the moderates are keeping their options open as is evident from the second phase of Longowal's new agitational programme where he threatens to virtually disown the Indian Constitution unless Article 25 is amended by February 26. Observers feel the demand for constitutional amendment is the moderates' way of ensuring that, in case competition from the hardliners becomes over-powering it might be pretty easy for them to go over to the other side.

Yet again, thus, Punjab stands on a turning point, awaiting bold political initiative from Delhi to clinch the issue. Dithering again will only strengthen the extremists, now more powerful than ever.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Amritsar

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Mountain Warfare

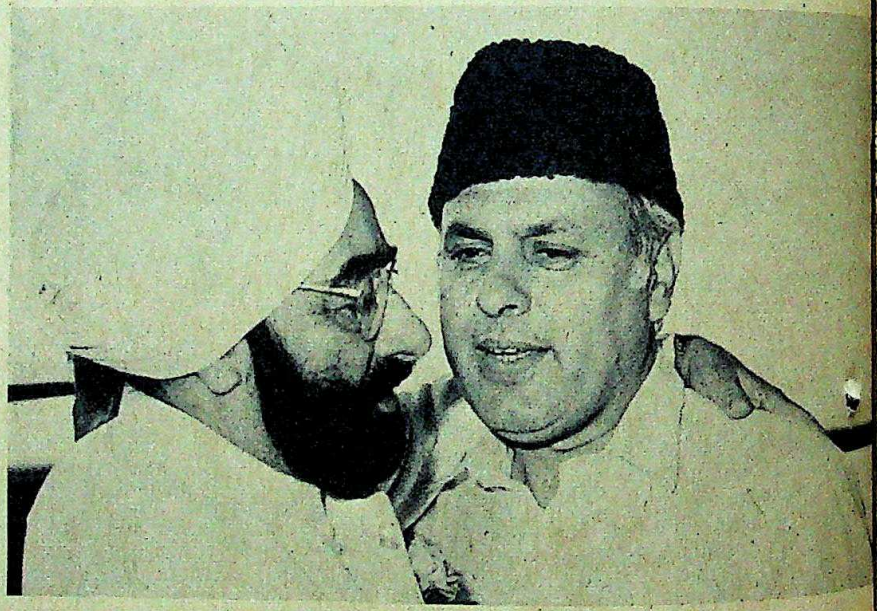
"I am a prisoner of the Congress(I)"
—J & K Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah



THE COULD not have chosen a metaphor more apt. On one side the Congress(I) attack with all guns blazing, on another the increasingly noisy squabbles in the Abdullah family with Farooq's brother-in-law G.M. Shah spoiling for a fight and now brother Tariq Abdullah making common cause with the rebels. With enemies within and without, it was no wonder that Farooq saw himself as a prisoner of forces beyond his control, a leader under siege.

The Congress(I) onslaught was undoubtedly the most visible. Continuing a four-month-old agitation, hordes of Congress(I) demonstrators last fortnight picketed courts, blocked roads, set buses and huts on fire and provoked police firings. Four people died on January 15 at Bijbehara in Anantnag district when the police opened fire—although AICC(I) General Secretary G.K. Moopanar claimed that nine had died, including an 18-year-old boy.

The Congress(I) leaders even brought President Giani Zail Singh into the picture. A four-member delegation led by Union ministers Arif Muhammad Khan and Ghulam Nabi Azad submitted a 10-page memorandum to the President listing alleged atrocities on the Congress(I) workers and demanded his intervention. Zail Singh forwarded the memorandum to the prime minister and state Governor, B.K. Nehru, for their comments. Earlier Farooq also called on the President and presented his points of view. Since the Congress(I) leaders had made substantiated yet sweeping charges, the Political Affairs Committee of the Cabinet met twice to consider the situation in the state and the consensus was to summon both Farooq and Nehru to New Delhi for discussions before deciding about any possible Central action.



Farooq with Zail Singh: presidential involvement

During his second meeting with the prime minister in two weeks, both stuck to their guns. While Mrs Gandhi sought Farooq's explanation for the 'deteriorating' law and order situation in the valley, Farooq maintained that she was not properly informed. A few stray incidents of violence, he asserted, were being blown up by the Congress(I) leaders to malign his government. He was, however, directed by the Central Government to keep a strict watch on the anti-national activities of certain elements in the valley and ensure that the police would not use excessive force against the administration. When Farooq returned to his state, there were no firm indications of the Congress(I) withdrawing their agitation against Farooq despite the fact that Gandhi nor Nehru was opposed to any Central action against the NC Government.

The agitation began last September and since then over 4,000 workers have court-

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arrest, 1,500 people have been injured in skirmishes with police and NC (National Conference) supporters. Scores of houses have been levelled. The pressure is relentless: 20 rallies, 90 dharnas and 200 demonstrations in the valley in the last three months. No wonder that tourist traffic—one of the mainstays of the state's economy—plummeted by 25 per cent. Farooq even told his followers that there was a plot to kill him—a belief considerably strengthened by the Calcutta attack on his car by Congressmen led by Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, and the Delhi attack on Jammu & Kashmir House by Youth Congress(I) workers led by Pradesh Committee President Jagdish Tytler, MP.

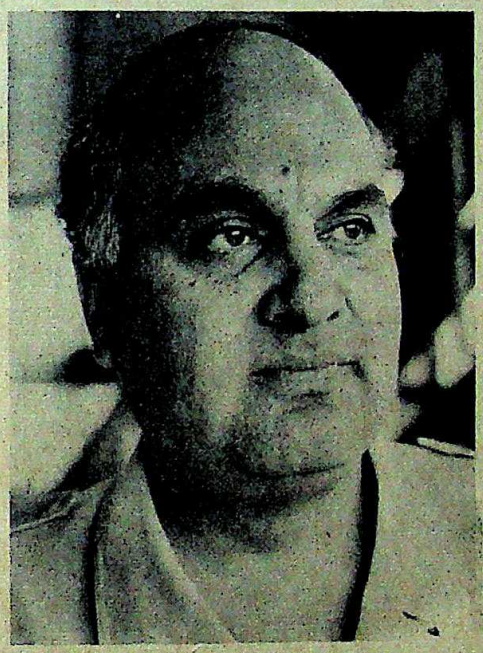
Vociferous Demands: There were demands for dismissal of the NC Ministry, though only from pro-Congress(I) politicians, not party office-bearers. The basic reasons for the drastic step were that it was sheltering communal and anti-national forces. Kushak Bakala, former Ladakh MP and member of the Minorities Commission, said that "the perpetuation of the Government that has failed in this sensitive state will prove disastrous for the country's unity."

Party functionaries, nevertheless, were explicit in their comments. K.C.Pant, Congress(I) spokesman on Jammu & Kashmir, felt that "Farooq has become a willing prisoner in the hands of the anti-national forces". Union Minister for Works and Housing Buta Singh thundered: "The Centre will not allow Jammu & Kashmir to be turned into an anti-India state." Former Union minister Mohammed Shafi Qureshi charged: "It is strange that in a democracy you are killed or beaten if you raise the Congress(I) flag in the valley of Kashmir or shout 'Azad Hindustan Zindabad!' But those who shout 'Pakistan Zindabad!' and say 'Indian dogs go back!' are making hay."

Farooq was equally forceful in replying to the Congress(I)'s invective. He retorted: "The Congress(I) is trying to paint all the Kashmiris as anti-national to make us suspect in the eyes of the people. They will not succeed in their nefarious designs." Farooq's audience with Mrs Gandhi—although it ended with expectations of more talks—did not help, and the agitation was resumed two days later. Curiously, the chief minister still believes of Mrs Gandhi that "I don't think she approves of what is happening in the state. She is misled by the people in the state. The local Congress(I) party is a group of burglars, thieves and goondas. They just can't remain out of power."

Secret Assessment: There were, however, indications that the agitation was having its political effect. Central intelligence agencies quietly carried out an assessment of the situation. The objective was to gauge Congress(I) popularity in the valley after the agitation and public response to the anti-Farooq speeches by both Central and state leaders; Farooq's control of his own Government and the party organisation; the possibility of Farooq losing his majority in the 46-member NC Legislature Party; Farooq's support with the people in the valley; and possible public reaction in the event of Central action.

The intelligence reports were quiet on public reaction to Farooq's ouster. But they were positive about the Congress(I)'s performance. The reports are full of phrases like "largely attended Congress(I) meetings" and the people's disagreement with "Farooq's confrontationist attitude" which they think is ruining the state. Said one of the dozen reports filed during the last three months:



Tariq Abdullah: lashing out

"The people in Kashmir feel that the state is losing heavily in tourism due to avoidable confrontation with the Central Government and they feel that the state can progress only with cordial relations between the National Conference and the Congress(I)."

Other reports are full of critical references to the state Government's performance and the revolt in the NC. In fact, an intelligence report filed as early as November had predicted that Tariq Abdullah, a political nonentity, would part company with his brother.

The reports admit that while the Muslims were by and large with Farooq, the Kashmiri Pandits and Hindus in Jammu considered the Congress(I) 'their party'. That the state was divided on communal lines was obvious from the fact that when the NC called for a state-wide bandh against the Congress(I)'s attempt to assault Farooq, only the valley responded; Jammu was normal though the NC had polled 26 per cent votes in Jammu. The intelligence reports, however, expressed the view that Congress(I) ranks in the valley were swelling gradually. It was these reports that finally persuaded Mrs Gandhi to launch the agitation.

THOUGH the Congress(I) is nowhere near dethroning Farooq as chief minister it has assiduously been following a well-planned strategy to expand its limited base in the valley and consolidate its following in the Jammu region. State Congress(I) leaders such as Mufti Mohammed Syed, the PCC(I) president and Maulvi Iftiqar Hussain Ansari, leader of the 26-member legislature party have convinced the high command that the Congress(I) can return to power on its own if it puts pressure on the ruling party. In fact, soon after the assembly elections in June 1983 the high command and state leaders worked out a long-term political strategy. Its salient features:

A publicity campaign to dub the Government as pro-Pakistani.

Encouraging dissidence within the NC to weaken the organisation from within.

Provoking a rift within the Abdullah family so that family followers are also split into feuding camps.

Engineering law and order problems in the state to justify any eventual Central action and forcing Farooq to confine himself to Jammu & Kashmir.

Preventing Farooq from taking bold administrative decisions.

The Congress(I) chose the longer road because it knew it could not form the Government by enticing defectors from the NC. Under the state's anti-defection act, a defector automatically loses his seat. So the Congress(I) began by exploiting the growing dissatisfaction within the Abdullah family against Farooq and found a willing partner in G.M. Shah, Farooq's brother-in-law. Shah was not alone in revolting: along with him left six prominent NC leaders including G.M. Kochak, Parmanand and M.K. Tikoo, who had been prominent in the party during Sheikh Abdullah's time.

Communal Problem: Then the Congress(I) raised the communal question, accusing Farooq of joining hands with communal forces like the Awami League led by *mirwaiz* Farooq in the valley, a point that helped it to gain the votes of the Jammu electorate. The spectacular victory of nine *mirwaiz*-supported candidates in the December 1983 elections to the 33-member Srinagar Municipal Girdhari Lal Dogra, Congress(I) MP from Jammu: "Farooq Abdullah is providing respectability to the communal forces by offering them seats. Not only will they consolidate their communal base they will pose a danger to communal harmony."

The Congress(I) is now eyeing the NC

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plenary session scheduled for February 11 and 12, called by the dissidents led by Shah and his wife, Farooq's sister Khaleda Begum. To ensure a strong turn-out Khaleda has been touring the state. As Shah is not very popular with many middle-level leaders, attempts are on to make Khaleda the dissident leader; she handled party affairs during Sheikh's time and is quite popular. Farooq has not summoned a general council meeting since his August 1981 coronation as NC chief by his father. Disclosed Shah: "The main objective of the conference is to move a no-confidence motion against the President Dr Abdullah and save the party from disaster."

Farooq's strategy appears to be to align himself with the national Opposition and rally it to his cause. Says he: "I want to tell the people that Kashmir is like any other state of the country. If something wrong is done to my state, let my country feel the pain." Opposition leaders have come out with strong statements in his favour. Says Syed Mir Qasim, former state chief minister: "New Delhi as it is now constituted will not rest till they dislodge him from the chief minister's post whatever the methods used to achieve the goal."

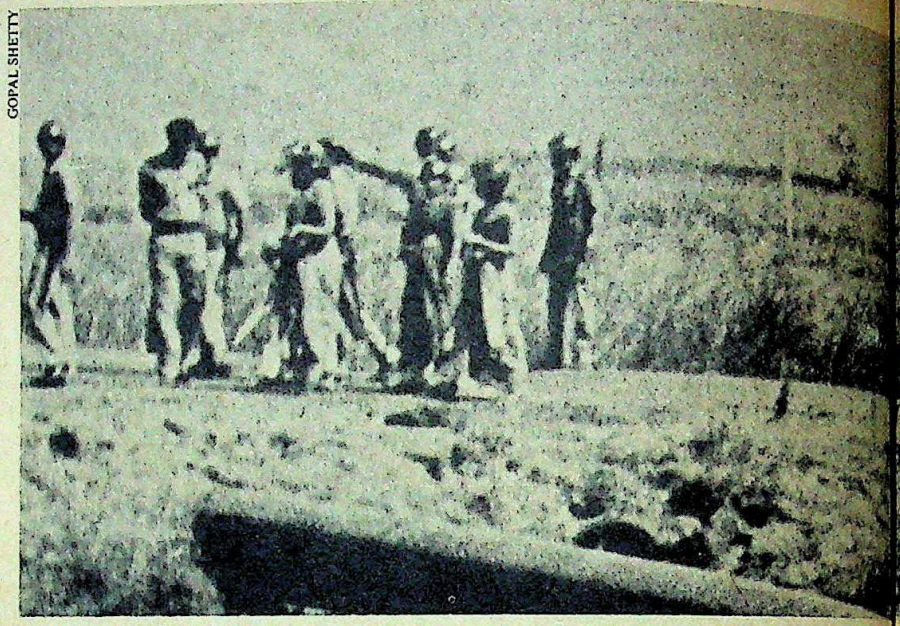
Qasim says that he will not accuse Farooq of shielding anti-national elements: "In 1965 thousands of infiltrators reached Srinagar when the Congress was in power. Who was fired at that time? No one. And no one was accused of hobnobbing with anti-national elements." George Fernandes puts it succinctly: "The Congress(I) simply refuses to tolerate Farooq because he refuses to be part of Mrs Gandhi's fiefdom."

Ominous Message: That is the most accurate assessment of the situation, judging by the contents of a pamphlet *The Challenge in Kashmir*, brought out by the AICC(I) last fortnight. It spoke of Farooq's "attitude of confrontation", looked back nostalgically to the understanding between Mrs Gandhi and Sheikh Abdullah that deteriorated because the Sheikh would not allow the Congress(I) to "strike a firm base in the valley."

It speaks of "encouragement to secessionist and anti-national elements" and warns that "if political adventurists are allowed to have their way, secular values allowed to be subverted and national integrity threatened, the consequences for the entire country will be very grave." It ends with the ominous statement: "Congressmen in the state are also looking to the Central leadership to deal with the situation as it deems fit to prevent it from deteriorating further." The message is clear: the party platoons in the state have done their bit; it is now New Delhi's turn. It appears that the battle for the valley has just begun.

-PRABHU CHAWLA

GOPAL SHETTY



MAHARASHTRA

The Farmer's Fight



WHEN the storm burst on the bleak coastal pocket of Raigad, it wasn't entirely unexpected. There had been plenty of warning that trouble would follow if the Government attempted to take possession of the 1,147 hectares notified for the Rs 500-crore Nhava Sheva port project. Sure enough, by end January, five villagers were dead, several injured, and many others arrested in scattered attempts to resist the acquisition. In fact, ever since 1970, when the state Government notified that 20,000 hectares of land spread over 93 villages would be acquired for the development of New Bombay, farmers here have been up in arms. As early as December last, the collectorate of Alibagh alerted the state Government that Nhava Sheva land would have to be taken forcibly and with a large number of preventive arrests to forestall violence. Farmers in the 11 villages along the Uran-Panvel Road, where the land was acquired, are hard core supporters of the Peasants and Workers Party (PWP) which had made it clear that the land would not be handed over without a struggle.

On January 8, at a conference of 20,000 farmers at Jasai, the Save Land Committee insisted that they would allow acquisition only if the price was raised from Rs 27,000 to Rs 40,000 per acre. On January 12 when the collector's men made the usual round of the villages, they were greeted with open hostility. Then with an amazing brutality the preventive arrests started. First to be picked up were some PWP leaders and major salt pan owners and farmers. On January 13, the police stormed into Sheva village and arrested 30 people. When the women tried to make a cordon around their men, the police opened fire and two were injured. On January 14, it was the turn of Bokadvira where 4 persons including three women were bundled into police vans after a lathi-charge.

That night, D.B. Patil, PWP MLA from Panvel and one-time leader of the Opposition in the Assembly who has been spearheading the Save Land Committee, was arrested in Uran. Being a heart patient, he had to be immediately rushed to St George's Hospital in Bombay. At Jasai village in the early hours of January 15, 300 people including all the able-bodied men of the village who could be found were taken away by the police.

Violent Consequences: The violence that followed was inevitable. A mob of 10,000 farmers, some carrying chilly powder and others batons, came to present a memorandum to the authorities near Jasai. The intended to disperse. But within minutes the State Reserve Police (SRP) opened fire. Over 60 rounds were fired at the crowd which included women and children. Two died and over a dozen were injured. The next day the tragedy was repeated at Dastan Phata nearby with three more dead and many injured.

The stunned farmers accuse the police men of being trigger-happy. The flat landscape provided no shelter from the bullets. They say over and over again that it was *"direct chaloo"* meaning that the aim was

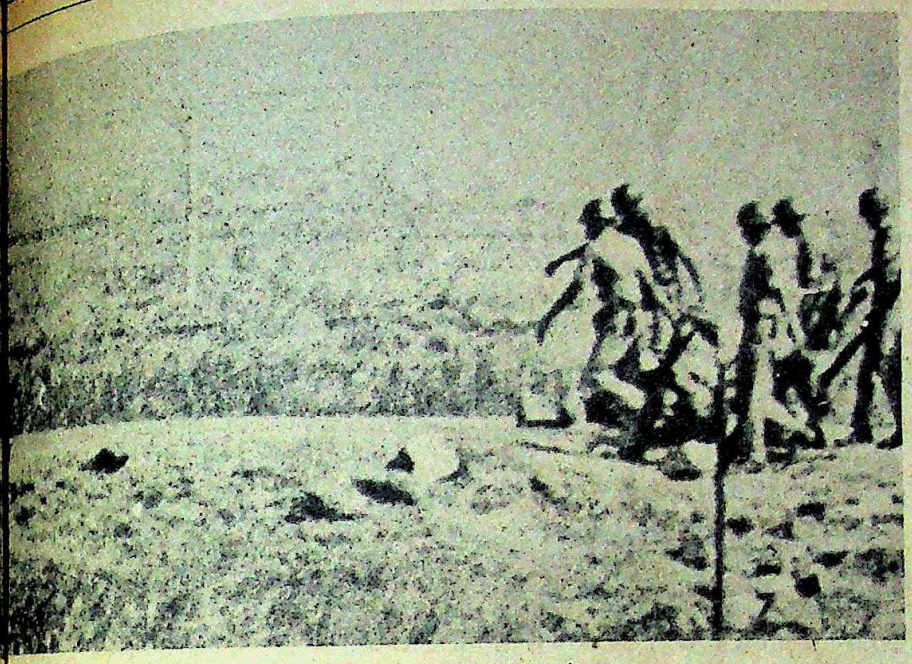
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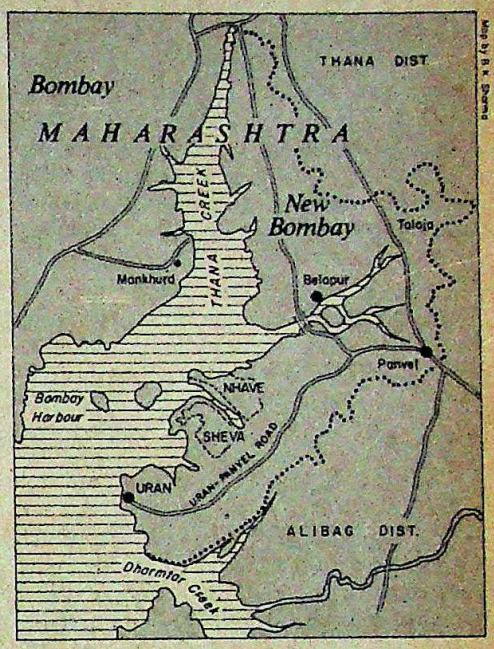
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SRP men dragging away one of the dead at Navghar Phatak and (right) Jasai village deserted except for women and children: harsh measures



carefully taken and no warning given. Asks Ashok Mhatra of Jasai: "If we were planning violence would we have taken our women and children with us?" Laxman Thakur, a landless labourer of Dhuttoom, whose father Raghunath Thakur died before his eyes, claims: "My father was injured in the thigh but was alive; the police dragged him with such callousness to the ambulance that he died of bleeding, not bullet injuries."

Terrorised Villagers: In Jasai, where D.B. Patil lives, no young men are to be seen even five days after the tragedy. The few who escaped arrest have fled. The women live in terror, not knowing where their menfolk are, since the arrested persons have been scattered in prisons all over the state at Yeroda, Ahmednagar, Thane and Alibagh. The school and dispensary are closed; as are the four shops, since the 11 villages had been blocked off from both Panvel and Uran. Supplies of everything from dal to kerosene and cooking oil are running out and they live on rice. "Who feels like eating, in any case, when our men are not here," says Nirmala Ghasa. "What kind of animals are these police?" screams Dharmoobhai Patil, raising a clenched fist, "if you bring one or two here I will settle them."

The high-handedness of the authorities extended to politicians and journalists. Opposition leaders including Sharad Pawar (Congress-S), Mohan Dharia (Janata), Ahilya Rangnekar (CPI-M), Mrinal Gore (Janata), Dutta Mehge (Congress-S), and Bhai Bhandarkar (PWP) were arrested and not allowed to address the farmers. In fact, the Panvel-Uran Road was sealed off. Journalists who tried to meet the villagers were told to walk. Gopal Shetty, photographer of the *Free Press Journal*, was beaten with lathis and his camera broken. When another correspondent Olga Tellis tried to intervene, her notebook was snatched away and she was manhandled.

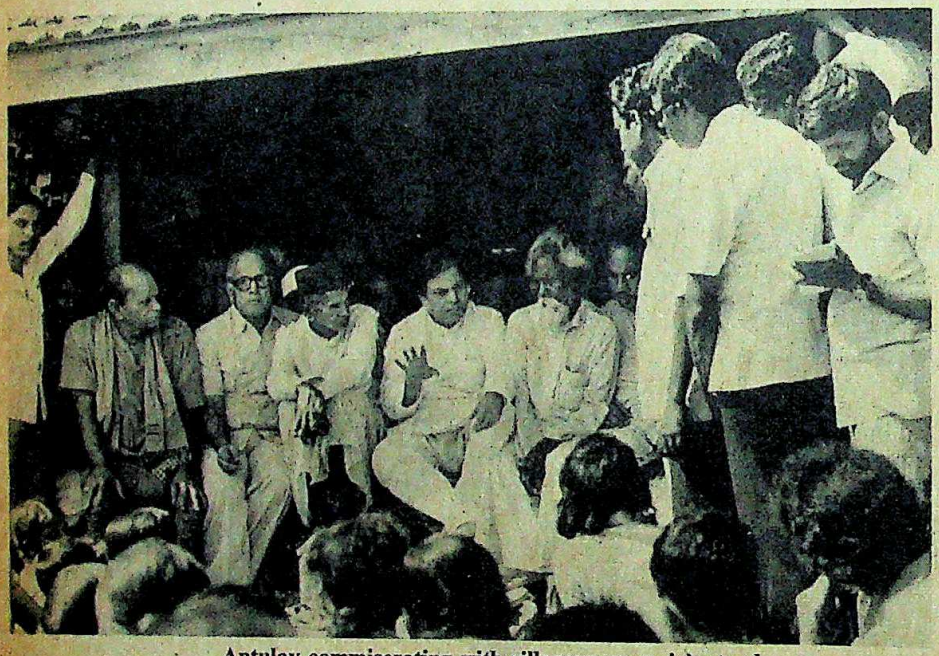
AS PUBLIC shock over the callousness of the authorities mounted, the entire Opposition, including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Shiv Sena, Republican Party of India (RPI) and Datta Samant's Kamgar Aghadis, came out in support of the farmer struggle. Pawar, keen to cement opposition unity in case of an election, announced a state-wide struggle demanding a higher price for the land. This led to a bandh in Bombay and Thane. Thousands joined the funeral cortege of the dead villagers in Bombay since the cremations were not allowed in Uran.

As disturbing for Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil as the rallying of the Opposition on the issue was the split in his own party ranks. Former chief minister Babasaheb Bhosale stated that "such a sensitive issue can hardly be solved by bullets". Bombay MLA, Bhaurao Patil launched a scathing attack on Vasantdada's Government at a Bombay Regional Congress Committee(I) (BRCC-I) meeting. Most significantly former chief minister A.R. Antulay not only

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demanded a judicial inquiry but created a ticklish problem for the Government by insisting on visiting the affected area, even though it had been cordoned off. When a senior police officer phoned Antulay at night requesting him not to visit Uran, he refused saying: "You can arrest me if you like." A show-down between the former chief minister and the Government did not take place as Antulay, with a cavalcade of pressmen and local Congressmen, was allowed to pass through though the police pointedly gave him no protection during his visit. While Vasantdada deplored the attempts of the Opposition and Antulay to politicise the land price issue, ironically enough Pawar, Antulay's old enemy, praised him for his bravery in visiting an area known to be a PWP bastion.



Antulay commiserating with villagers: maverick stand

Sympathetic Recommendation: As he moved through the villages commiserating, Antulay repeated that the Government attitude was not consistent with his party's stand. In a telegram to Mrs Gandhi he accused the police of brutality and urged her to look into the price compensation aspect differently for land required for development purposes and that for a commercial project as the new port. Antulay had reason to feel strongly on the firing, since he is from Raigad himself.

Vasantdada, however, remained adamant that if Rs 40,000 was given, it would affect prices of acquisition all over the state. Hinting that the Central Government and the World Bank, which is jointly sponsoring the Nhava Sheva port project, were unwilling for a price increase of more than Rs 27,000 per acre, Vasantdada charged that the Opposition's adamant stand might result in the state losing the project altogether.

D.B. Patil and Pawar insisted that they were not objecting to the port project, but to the land price. They claim that the City Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO) which is in charge of developing the entire land for the New Bombay complex was making fat profits. Land bought from farmers for as low as Rs 4 per sq m was being resold for as high as Rs 400 per sq m. Since CIDCO had put a blanket notification for acquisition of over 20,000 hectares back in 1970, the farmers felt naturally aggrieved that while land prices in the area had shot up dramatically due to the urbanisation scheme by CIDCO, they were unable to benefit from the increased prices—particularly because so far CIDCO has taken over only 3,528 hectares.

For the PWP, key evidence that CIDCO has the ability to pay Rs 40,000 is a CIDCO agenda note to a meeting on December 6, 1982, suggesting that CIDCO support the farmers' claim for increased compensation up to Rs 40,000 per acre. The note was not, however, approved at the meeting.

Charges Denied: Ram Mahadik, Congress(I) chairman of CIDCO, vehemently disagrees. He notes that the main cost of CIDCO land is the development price, including providing infrastructure of roads and drains. Only about 10 per cent of the land is sold at a commercial profit. The rest is reserved for schemes for the economically weaker sections and for social amenities. Mahadik denies that last year in June he suggested the price of Rs 40,000 per acre at a meeting. The decision rests purely with the chief minister, and not with CIDCO, he claims. Mahadik accuses the PWP of "spreading misinformation". In fact as late as 1983 the land acqui tion price was only Rs 15,000 to Rs 20, for land in the neighbourhood required ONGC's schemes. But some large farmers w went to court on the issue have been awarde as much as Rs 50,000 per acre.

While claiming that CIDCO's "huge pr fits should be shared" by the farmers, D Patil admits that the main issue is not, how ver, the land compensation but rehabilita ion for the farmers who will be losing the means of livelihood and in some cases the homes as well. CIDCO and ONGC's record o oviding employment for project affected pe sons has been extremely poor (INDIA TODA September 30, 1983). Disagreeing with th Mahadik notes that CIDCO has given jobs 704 boys from the New Bombay region an another 759 have been employed by the Bo mbay Metropolitan Transport Corporation He says as many as 1,925 local youth have s far been given stipends for training in indu strial training institutes or training colleges

The Nhava Sheva port will unfortuna tely not be able to provide many jobs when i is completed, since the port is to be complete ly mechanised. The first stage of the projec half of which is being financed by the Worl Bank, is scheduled for completion by end o 1987 and is already behind target which w one of the reasons for the urgency behin taking possession of the land.

Film Allegiance: District authoritie allege that the PWP has been able to keep farmers solidly behind it even though some might have been willing to accept the R 27,000 price by the notorious system o *gavki*—an informal local village body entit led to order stern punishment to any resident who dares defy the community decision. "This is nothing but a form of bullying," in sists a Congress(I) worker of Panvel. Still the PWP definitely has a special hold over the area. In fact, the three MLA's from Pen Panvel and Alibagh are all from the party.

But if the farmers are adamant, the stat Government seems equally keen to prove to the Centre and the World Bank that work on the Nhava Sheva project has started in ear nest. Even as curfew prevailed, police patro led the area and tension continued as 10 workmen were rushed to Sheva to dig the ap proach road for a jetty. A triumphant messa ge flashed to Bombay to announce that Possession of the land, explains Collecto Sanjay Narayan, was taken by the officials on January 15 in the presence of five witnes ses, since none of the land owners showed up for the ceremony. Hardly surprising, since most were under arrest. D.B. Patil retorts "They may have taken technical possession of the land but they have certainly not taken physical possession." That clearly indicates that the Nhava Sheva land battle is likely to escalate further. — COOMI KAPOOR in Bom

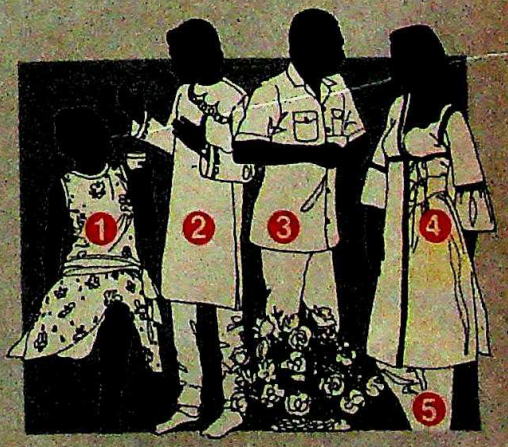
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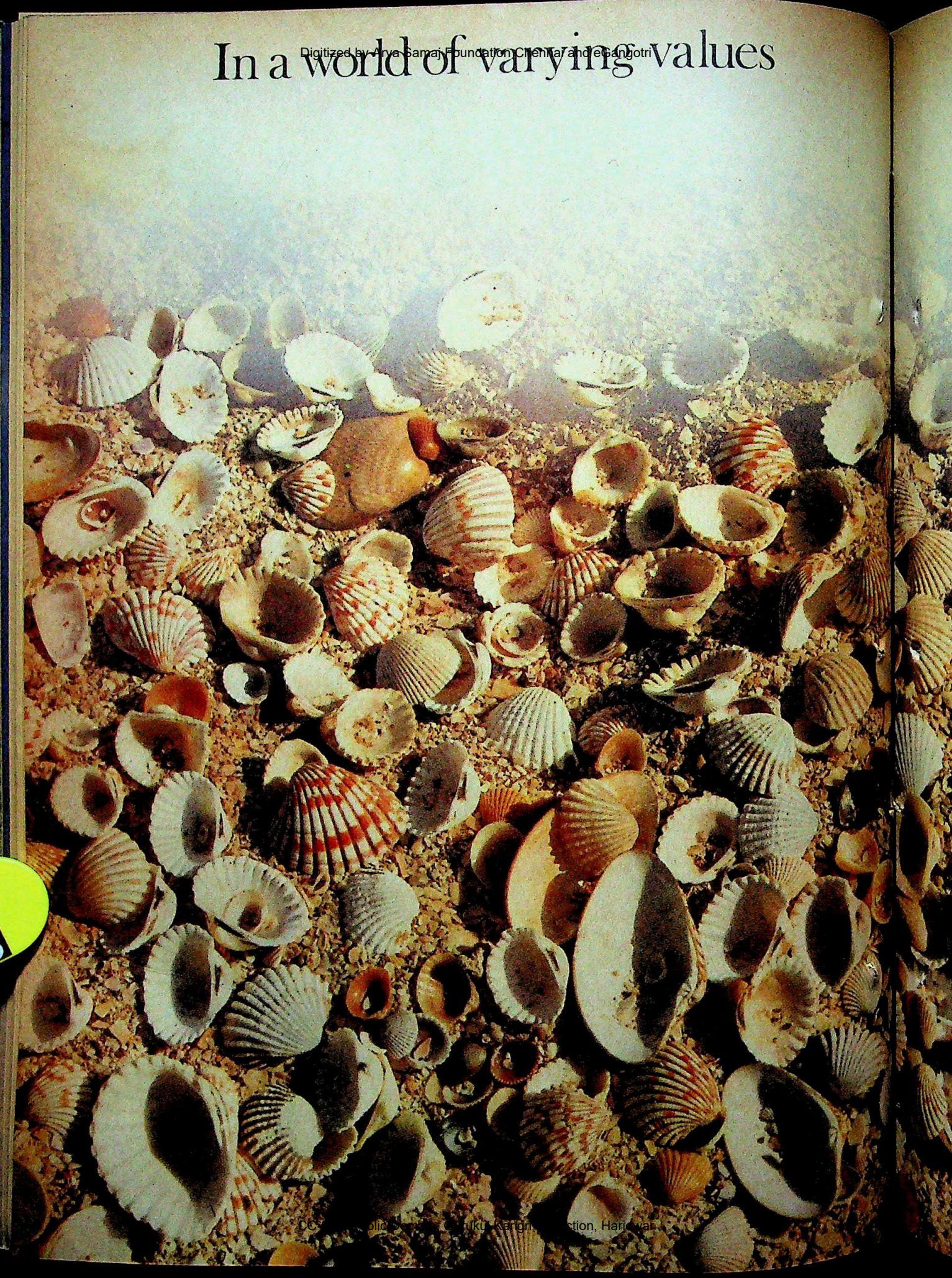
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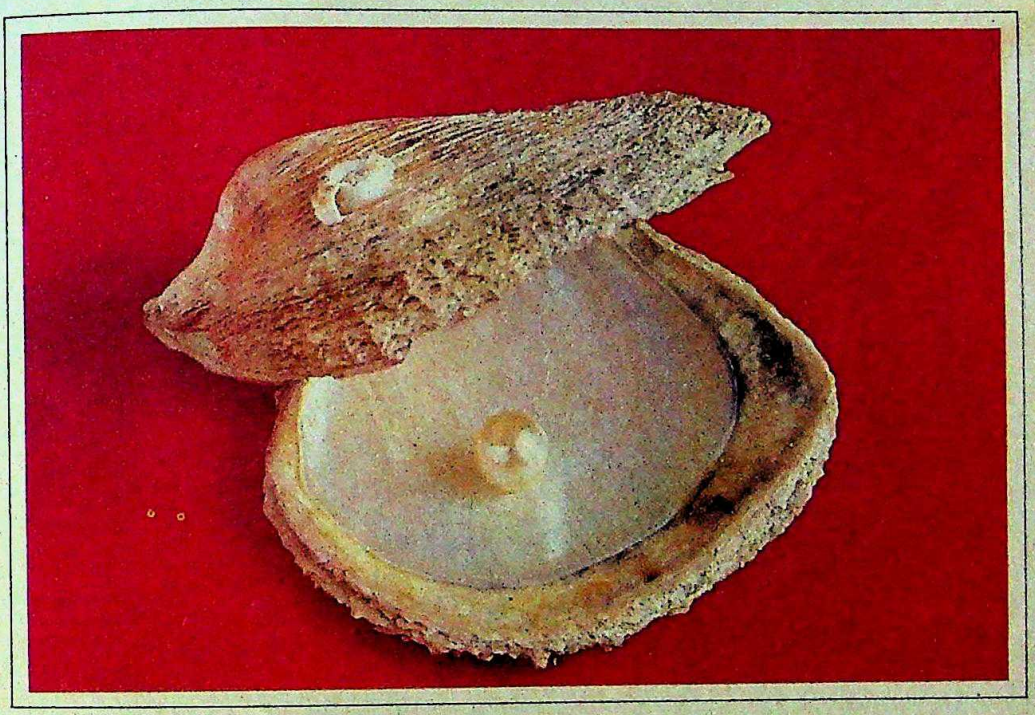
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DYNAM

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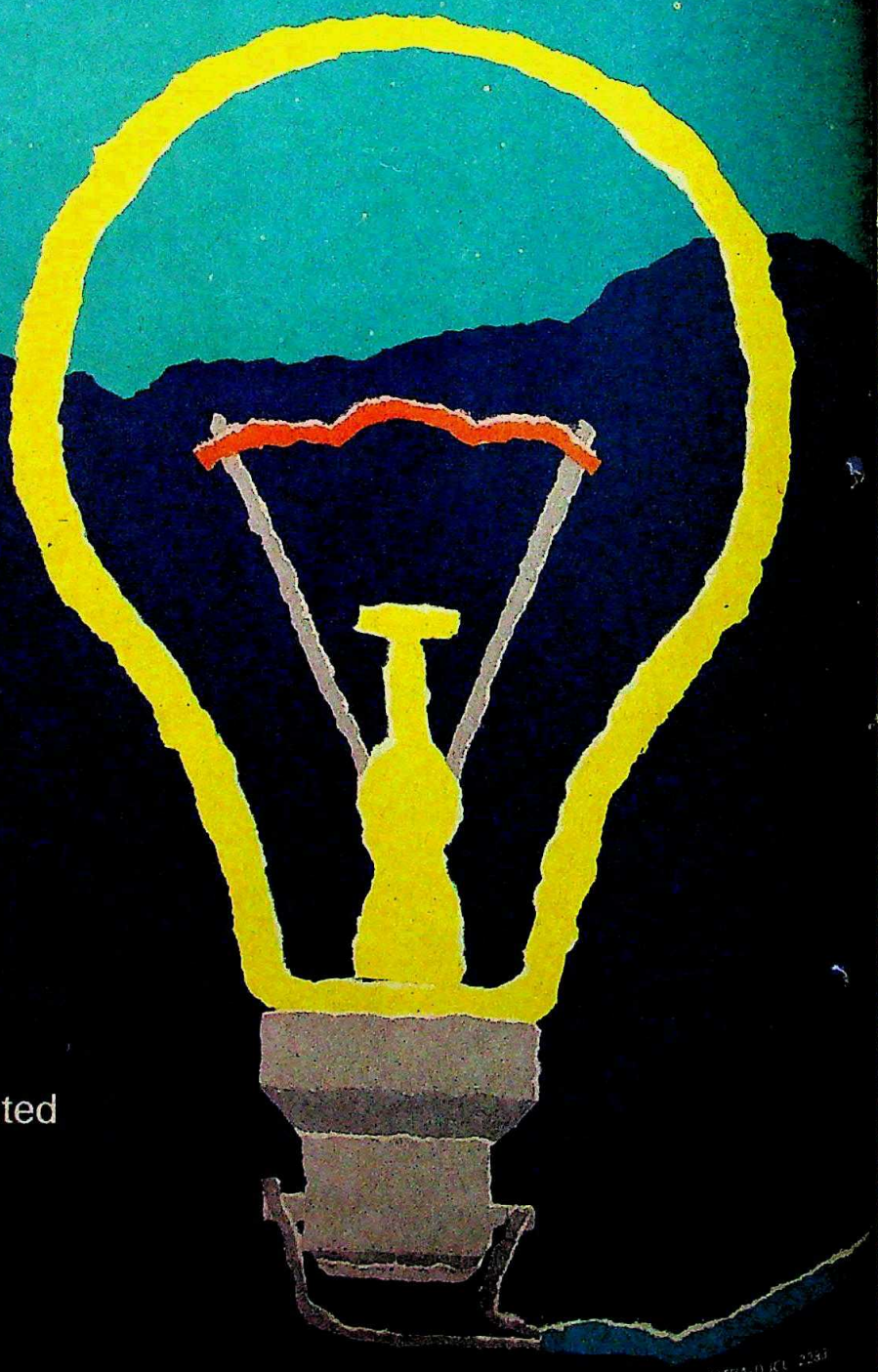
The United States, 1845. A patent was filed for the invention that succeeded in prolonging the day, giving mankind longer hours for work and relaxation. Today, wherever there is electricity, there is the electric bulb — or its later incarnation, the fluorescent tube.

Although Edison is widely credited with the invention of the bulb, the first filament lamp patent was filed by J.W. Starr in the U.S.A., in 1845. He suggested using filaments of carbon enclosed inside a bulb that had the air pumped out of it.

But the early bulbs burnt out much too soon for practical use. The longer-lasting lamp was demonstrated by Joseph Swan of Britain in January, 1879 and by Thomas Edison — ten months later. The two inventors later joined forces to form the Edison and Swan Electric Light Company, to manufacture light bulbs in Britain. And, in the process, completely transformed the life of the human race.

Such has been the story of inventors and inventions throughout history. From the first elementary wheel to the microchip, man has constantly searched for better alternatives, sought solutions to problems and attempted to explain what had so far been inexplicable.

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WEST BENGAL

Aborted Offensive

ENCOURAGED by the vitriolic attacks on the ruling Left Front Government in West Bengal by the Congress(I) in its plenary session held recently in the state capital, the party's local unit evidently thought it highly appropriate to follow through with a blow or two of its own against the Marxists. It picked on Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah, who was in Calcutta last fortnight for the opposition conclave hosted by the state Government. The move was calculated to both embarrass the state Government and demonstrate the resentment of Congressmen against the deaths of four of their colleagues during police firings in Jammu & Kashmir in January. Confident that their agitation would have the full backing of their party's Central leadership, state Congress(I) workers swung into action—but just as the agitation began to gather momentum, an abrupt telephone call from AICC(I) General Secretary Chandulal Chandrakar brought the whole show to a grinding halt.

A baffled Ananda Gopal Mukherjee, president, West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee(I) (WBPCC-I), reluctantly called his men to heel, much to the resentment of younger firebrand partymen like Subrata Mukherjee, Soumen Mitra and Priya Ranjan Das Munshi who had been raring for a go against the Marxists.

Typically, the aborted agitation had been planned rather haphazardly. It began with an early morning demonstration against Abdullah at the Calcutta airport where he had gone to catch his flight to Delhi. The demonstrators, led by Munshi, Mitra and Sudip Bandopadhyaya surrounded Farooq's car—the car was damaged, though Abdullah himself escaped unhurt. Even then, senior party leaders in Calcutta claimed total ignorance of the entire operation.

Belated Action: Meanwhile, the official state Government reaction took some time coming. A full 36 hours after the airport incident, Chief Minister Jyoti Basu angrily told the press that the police had neglected its duties in not having the culprits arrested. In point of fact, the police had just sent a scrappy routine report to the Government which neither explained why the demonstrators could not be held at bay nor even how they managed to get within striking distance of Abdullah. With Basu breathing down their necks, the police belatedly arrested the three leaders of the agitation in a late-night swoop. Congressmen responded next day with a 'rasta roko' agitation which resulted, after some buses had been set on fire, in a near-total withdrawal of transport from the city roads. The entire city seemed to have been taken over by rowdy young men who forced even chemists and druggists to down their shutters. As panic gripped the city, policemen seemed conspicuous by their absence —almost all 18,000 of them.

When Basu demanded an explanation for this extraordinary situation, Police Commissioner Nirupam Som came up with the excuse that as maximum security was required for the Nehru International Football Tournament then in progress, he could not spare any force to deal with the vandalism being perpetrated all over the city. The explanation left the ministry aghast, and the chief minister, making no secret of his belief that a certain section of the police force was in cahoots with the Congress(I), promised to deal with them.

If all this gladdened the hearts of the Congress(I) state unit, they did not have much time to gloat over it. The three arrested leaders, Munshi, Mitra and Bandopadhyaya, on being produced in court, refused bail and instead demanded unconditional release. This being beyond the scope of the court, the magistrate remanded them to judicial custody till the end of January. As they were being carted away to prison, the three defiantly sent out a call to their fellow partymen that the agitation protesting the arrests should be intensified. It was at this



BIKASH DAS



BIKASH DAS

Congress(I) workers courting arrest in Calcutta (top) and a city transport bus burnt by the demonstrators: jumping the gun

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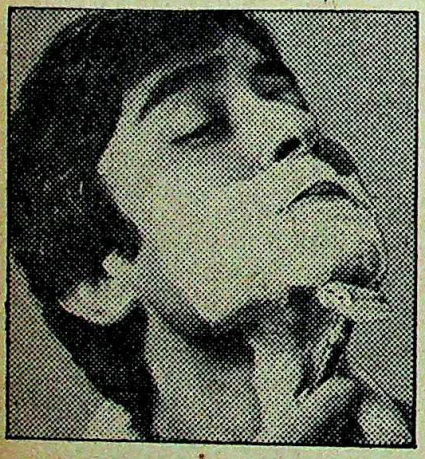
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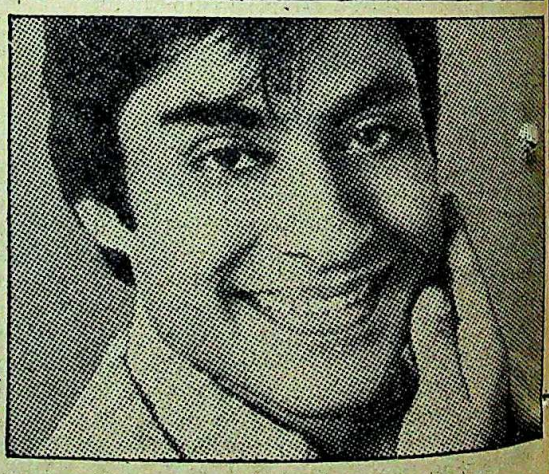












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point that the bombshell fell. A message came from Delhi, quoting the prime minister herself: "Stop this agitation immediately and tell the three to accept bail." There was nothing to do then but sign the bail papers.

Second Thoughts: To their further mortification, their own state leaders too began expressing doubts about the efficacy of such agitations. Said Ananda Gopal Mukherjee at a meeting of the WBPCC(I): "We will first have to find out whether the time has come to mobilise the people to fight the Left Front. We should not launch any movement before we do that." While this certainly annoyed the younger section of the party, and the meeting saw the usual display of frayed tempers, no one dared disobey the command from Delhi. But they did so grudgingly: Subrata Mukherjee publicly complained about this as "another instance of the Central leadership imposing its will on us without realising our position".

The prime minister's directive might have mystified the local partymen, but observers see this as yet another attempt by Mrs Gandhi to strike a bargain with the Marxists. Even as the agitation unfolded in Calcutta, Mrs Gandhi called CPI(M) politburo member P. Ramamurthi to her office, and according to his report to the state leaders of his party, began the discussions with an angry protest against the arrests. She then went on to say: "However, I have asked my boys to simmer down, and I hope your party will reciprocate." This has been taken as a gentle hint to go easy on the united opposition being built up against the Congress(I).

Firm Repudiation: An angry Jyoti Basu retorted: "Is she trying to strike a bargain with us just at a point of time when we hosted an opposition meeting to unitedly fight the policies of her party?" Rejecting any such overtures, Basu went on to publicly exhort the youth cadres of his party to "mobilise public opinion against the Congress(I) which is a party of anti-socials and goondas". He also sent Mrs Gandhi photographs of the burnt buses "to make her realise what her partymen are up to in West Bengal".

On the other hand, her partymen themselves, left high and dry after last fortnight's experience, are not sure any more whether they should be up to anything at all. They have noticed that whenever they come out on the streets against the Marxists, they are pulled up by Delhi. Lamented one young Congress(I) leader: "Every time we try to organise people against the Marxists, which the high command says we must do, we are prevented at the take-off stage. We just don't know what to do." But at least until the various alignments are formalised for the general elections, the enthusiasm of the state Congress(I) might have to remain bridled.

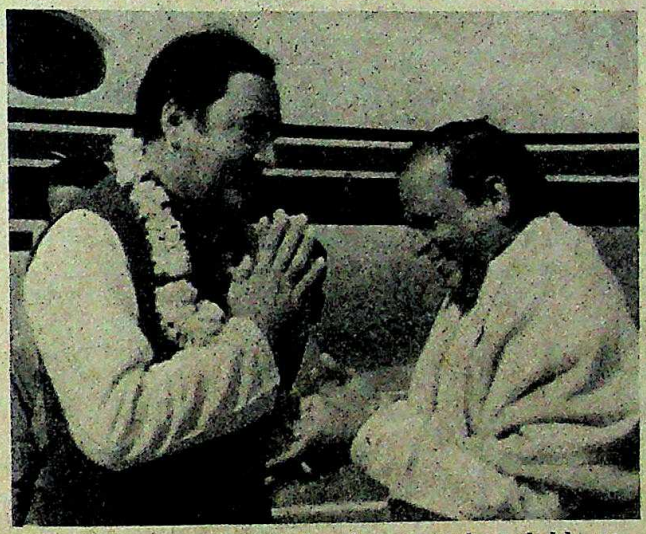
— SUMANTA SEN

ORISSA

Timely Tour



RAJIV GANDHI finally made it to Orissa—and in the process cleared a lot of bad feelings generated last month when he had suddenly cancelled his proposed visit to the state. His four-day tour now gave Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik a chance to get over his past humiliation and slip back into the limelight, and indeed, the trip turned out to be as much Patnaik's show as it was Rajiv's. Said an enthusiastic Patnaik supporter: "Rajiv came and saw but it was Patnaik who conquered."



Patnaik receives Rajiv at the airport: much-needed boost

From January 17 to 20, the state again decked itself up in welcoming arches all along Rajiv's 1,500 km route. This was to be no routine trip. Rajiv had no time for either the dissidents or for a party workers' rally or even a state Congress(I) meeting. Instead, his mission, he said, was to see for himself just how happy the people were, and what areas in the state needed to be developed.

Study Tour: In his four-day stay, that began every day at 7 a.m. and ended past midnight, Rajiv achieved just that. Through the tribal districts of Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj and Dhankanal and into the coastal areas of Cuttack, Puri and Balasore, he rubbed shoulders with about 1 million villagers. He attended over 200 way-side receptions and addressed about 100 impromptu meetings against the scheduled 48. By the end of his trip, Rajiv had achieved his mission: the overall performance of the Patnaik Government was "good" and this was based on the "very positive response of the people".

The one exception where the dissidents did get a chance to voice their grievances was at the Pipli assembly constituency. Bipin Das, the high-profile dissident leader of the district said that Pipli had also been carefully left out by the organisers. It was only included in the last stage at his insistence. At the public meeting held there, Bipin Das and Braj Mohan Mohanty, another dissident MP urged Rajiv to see that development schemes made it to that constituency as well.

While the dissidents were more or less ignored throughout the trip and Ram Chandra Rath, Union minister of state for fertilisers and chemicals and arch-rival of Patnaik was slighted because he was not consulted or given an audience at all, it was Chief Minister Patnaik who got the maximum political mileage out of Rajiv's presence. Even the progressive Orissa daily *Pragativadi* commented that all the expenditure made on the trip by the Government was nothing compared to the political gain Patnaik had made. Said party Chief Whip Gugupada Nanda: "People were happy to see Rajiv and his visit has enhanced the image of the party and further strengthened its base in the state."

Lavish Expenditure: Nevertheless, there was no denying that a packet had been spent on the trip. Said a journalist who accompanied Rajiv throughout: "Rajiv was given a reception due to a head of state." Janata Legislator Shrikant Jena estimated Rs 80 lakh to Rs 1 crore had been spent on the programme. State BJP Vice-President Ram Chandra charged that the money could have been better spent on welfare programmes in a state where 67 per cent of the population still lives below the poverty line.

Patnaik and his party functionaries however dismissed these as baseless. Says Nanda: "Rajiv had clearly instructed that there should be no pomp and show and we avoided it throughout. He got the people's spontaneous response due to the popularity of the party and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi."

Rajiv's own response to the allegations was much in his mother's style. The press, he said, had a totally distorted view of everything. It was much too cynical and gave distorted views. The pomp and the show and the elaborate security arrangements, he said, were made for the chief minister and he was legally entitled to them. While Rajiv might genuinely have upset a handful of people during his visit, that was more than offset by the overall response and the much-needed boost it indirectly gave Patnaik.

—FARZAND AHMED

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BIHAR

The Colliery Crackdown

THE COALFIELDS of Dhanbad have long been glowing hotbeds of political intrigue, muscle power and gangsterism cloaked in the garb of trade unionism. Periodic crackdowns by the authorities have proved futile and temporary. Subsequently, last fortnight's crackdown elicited little interest till the main intention became clear—the arrest of Suryadeo Singh, 48, the most powerful union leader in the area and the most controversial of Dhanbad's "Dons". Following Singh's threat to "paralyse the coal industry any moment", the Union Energy Ministry ordered the Bihar Government to arrest Singh.

That, however, is hardly as easy as it sounds. Singh is a formidable enemy to have. He leads what is claimed to be the largest trade union, the Janata Mazdoor Sangh, with an estimated membership of over 70,000, mostly coal-miners. He is widely considered the uncrowned king of the coalfields and his clout is illustrated by the fact that he has 20 criminal cases pending against him and has been arrested thrice in the past and is still free.

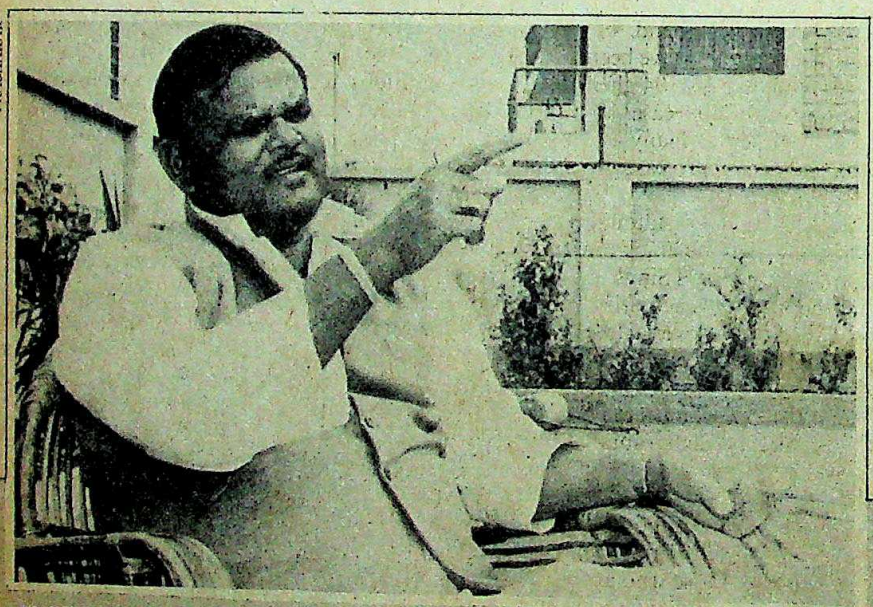
Stern Decision: His latest threat came in retaliation to the decision of Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL) to deduct eight days wages for each day the workers went on strike and lay off chronic absentee workers—a decision designed to curb the sharp fall in production and the rampant absenteeism that had reached a new and dangerous high last year. The policy resulted in over 1,150 workers being sacked and others losing their wages. Singh then issued his challenge, bringing senior Bihar officials including Chief Secretary K.K. Srivas and Director General of Police G. Nara rushing to Dhanbad.

After hurried meetings, Coal Indi mited (CIL), the parent organisation, as BCCL officials to derecognise the unions the Energy Ministry issued instructions arrest Singh. So far, the authorities have clined. Says Railway Police Superinten Rakesh Jaruhar: "We cannot arrest a per merely on an executive order unless the sufficient evidence."

But there are other signs that making one last desperate effort to bre the backbone of what is popularly kno as the Dhanbad mafia. The targets of crackdown are those areas which have abled people like Singh to wield the kind power they do. All contracts, specially tho relating to transport, would be abolished reviewed, BCCL is now to have its own tran port system. Security has been considerab tightened and over 700 security personn have been transferred to other areas. T company was also scrutinising the files all workers and anyone with a crimin record is to be struck off the rolls.

Harsh Measures: Singh sees it as a co spiracy to put him and his union leade behind bars and victimise the workers. H argues that after the third wage revision w announced, BCCL workers were to get ann benefits of Rs 50 crore. To meet this su increase, he claims, CIL Chairman M. Gujral issued a secret circular to lay off 6,0 workers. Says he: "With the retrenchme of these workers, the company will sav Rs 70 crore annually by way of gratuity wages and allowance. My union will no allow this nefarious design to succeed."

BCCL management, however, insists that harsh measures were necessary to deal with



PRABHAKAR

SURYADEO SINGH

"I will continue to fight"

DESPITE his prominence and public reputation, Suryadeo Singh keeps a low profile as far as publicity is concerned. Last fortnight, incensed by the BCCL crackdown, he called his first-ever news conference to register his protest. Shortly after, he granted INDIA TODAY Correspondent FARZAND AHMED an exclusive interview. Excerpts:

Q. *Why are the police after you?*

A. It began in 1977 when I was elected as an MLA. One Harijan girl was gangraped and murdered and people came to me for help. I got enraged and organised the Harijans and challenged the criminals as well as the administration. I never speak a lie. It was then I was directly implicated in a violence case.

Q. *The police say there are 20 cases ranging from murder to conspiracy against you.*

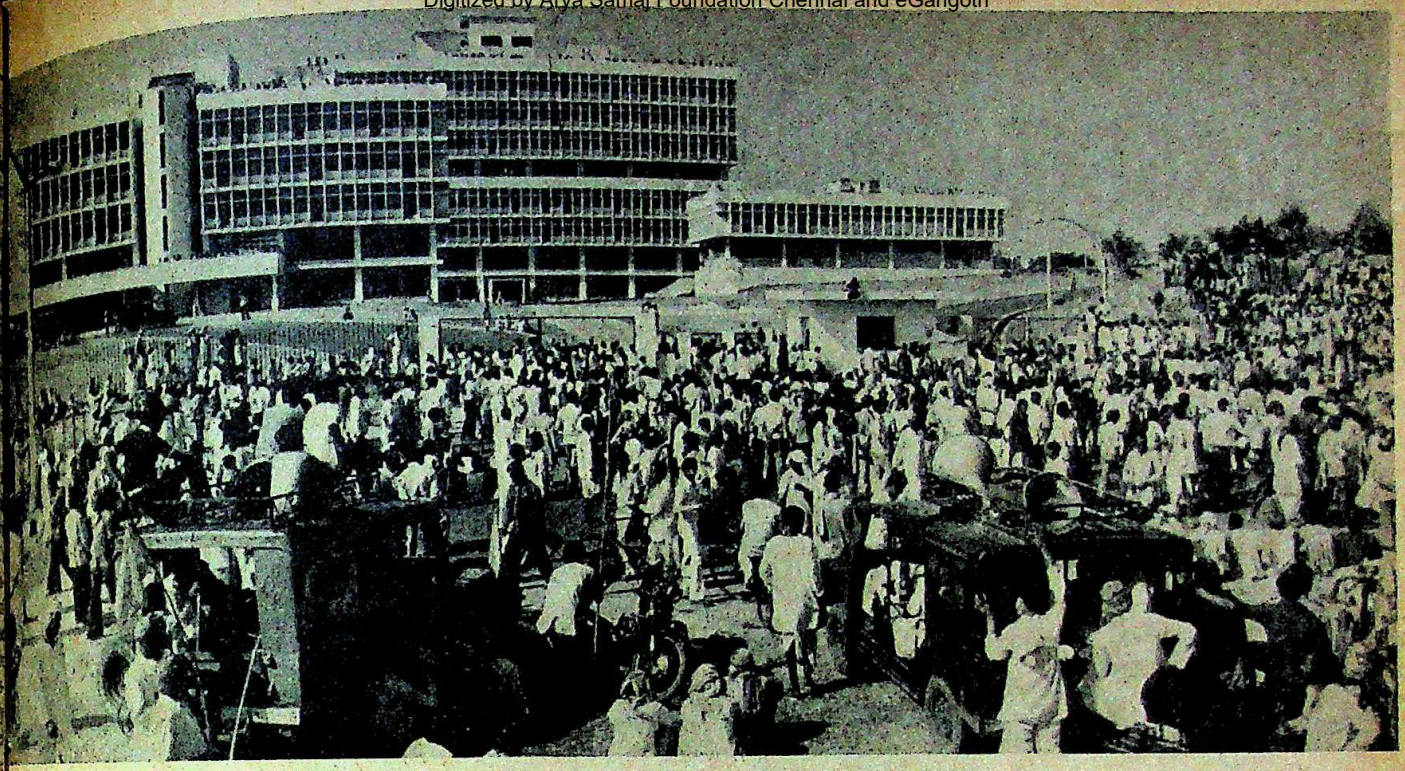
A. All are bogus. For the first time I was arrested under Crime Control Act in 1979 on baseless charges. I was again arrested by the order of the Ranchi bench of the high court and then in 1982 under NSA. After six months I was released from jail as Bihar Government after investigation found that the charge had no leg to stand on. Now, again, a conspiracy has been hatched to arrest me. The Union Government has asked the state administration. This is funny because for the past one month I am in Patna and only once or twice have stepped out of my house. Recently they arrested my brother.

Q. *Did you threaten to chop off the hands of those officials who ordered sacking of workers and deduction of wages?*

A. Such allegations are part of the conspiracy to defame me and my union. The trinity of CIL, local administration and political bosses belonging to other parties are really worried at the pace with

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A Janata Mazdoor Sangh rally before the BCCL office in Dhanbad: bracing for a fight

the worsening situation. Out of a total of 1.72 lakh workers, there are 46,000 miner-loaders who form the main productive force of the collieries. According to Chairman-cum-Managing Director Chandra Shekhar Jha, in October, against the desired attendance of 30,000 a day, only about 10,000 were showing up daily and production figures plummeted. Says Jha: "We tried offering allurements but nothing succeeded and finally we took penal action." The move worked: Attendance jumped to 26,000 a day and production increased from 47,000 tonnes a day in October to 67,000 tonnes in November.

The move comes belatedly, however. Statistics reveal that the union situation was clearly getting out of hand. From 1979 till November 1983, there have been 607 strikes, 4.73 lakh mandays lost, 94 gheraos, 227 demonstrations and 109 cases of assault. In addition, there are as many as 11,000 coalfield-related criminal cases pending in Dhanbad courts.

But clearly, the ultimate objective behind last fortnight's crackdown is to undermine the influence of Singh and his fellow union leaders. Singh's activities have remained unchallenged for over a decade now and the arrest of his brother, Bachcha Singh, in the wake of the crackdown is clear warning that he will be the main target. A brawny, cruel-faced man, Singh rapidly rose to a position of influence. By 1977, he was given a ticket by the Janata Party to contest elections and has been an MLA ever since.

He now owns two mansions, one in Patna and the other in Dhanbad, two cinema houses and a large fleet of trucks and cars. In Dhanbad, the mere mention of his name evokes fear. His threat of paralysing the coal industry unless the workers are taken back cannot be treated lightly. "The country has stock for 15 days only. If I paralyse the coal industry for 20 days, the entire country will be crippled and this will happen soon," he warns. The battle of Dhanbad promises to be a bloody and protracted one.

—FARZAND AHMED

which Janata Mazdoor Sangh has been taking roots. M.S. Gujral is angry because I could not surrender before him like other leaders for certain gains. Nobody or no party can compel me to submit.

Q. *But the general impression is that you are a criminal protecting criminals.*

A. If anybody proves that I have committed any wrong or supplied any pressure on local administration for wrong purposes I will quit Dhanbad. But I will continue to fight against exploitation. No leader in Dhanbad is honest and if what I am doing for the poor is a crime then I will like to be called so and would like such criminals to help society. Unless somebody makes sacrifices, society will not change.

Q. *Why are you referred to as mafia?*

A. I do not know the meaning of mafia and nobody is ready to make me understand this. Everybody calls others mafia. I want that if I do wrong I must be punished but those who are indulging in loot and plunder through pen are never caught. Those who murdered the innocent and indulge in other crimes are not called mafia, but since I fight against criminals and demand action I am mafia.

Q. *But you too have criminals and arms to defend yourself.*

A. Wrong. I do not have criminals and I never depend on criminals as criminals can be bought and sold.

Q. *Do you believe in violence?*

A. No. I believe in Gandhian philosophy but one thing I know if someone slaps you, you never offer your other cheek because then your neck will be off. People are like this. So I think, if anybody raises a finger without reason, remove the hands.

Q. *How did you start your career?*

A. I was a very poor man. Many times I went without bread so I decided to earn money and help the poor. I worked as a miner and was exploited. I have seen poverty in its crudest form. I got some work with the help of friends and quit miner's job in 1964-65. After that I got some job of contractor. I worked hard and reached this stage. I own houses and cinema halls. I still have small contract work in Sindri but have given up transport work and am now fighting for the poor workers.

Q. *Are you afraid of being killed?*

A. Those whom I oppose always tried to kill me. Several attempts with bombs and guns have been made on my life but I am fearless. If I am to die I will die. Nobody can prevent this so I work with sincerity and without fear.

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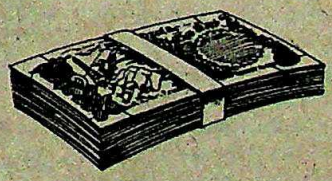
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THE OPPOSITION

Playing for Time

AT LEAST a part of the Opposition seems to be getting its act together. Last fortnight's Calcutta conclave of 16 parties, once billed as the occasion that would have brought the feuding United Front and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) together, saw a consolidation of the left inclined front, the communists, Telugu Desam and the National Conference. But it could make no headway towards a larger united opposition in the absence of which the Congress(I) still holds certain trump cards.

The chorus of optimism that emerged at the end of the two days of discussion was, therefore, not quite as convincing as it was meant to be. The mood of enthusiasm was expressed by CPI(M) politbureau member M. Basavapunniah, one of the 70-odd delegates, when he said: "The left and democratic unity is there in the womb and none can abort it. And this time it will not be a Jayaprakash Narayan-type movement."

Elaborating on his claim, Basavapunniah went on to explain that the coming days will not witness a directionless upsurge (which the Marxists have always maintained JP's total revolution to have been) but a well-planned movement on definite economic and political issues. The prevailing mood was that if one had to point out a single factor to denote that the successive conclaves had been successful, then it was this "new sense of unity".

The United Front (comprising the Janata, Congress(S), Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), Janwadi Dal and Rashtriya Congress) spokesman and former diplomat I.K. Gujral said: "The process has a major merit in that political parties with such divergent characteristics should have zeroed in on such a large variety of issues. It is the beginning of bipolar politics and also the building up of a national consensus against the perverse politics of Indira Gandhi which has caused all priorities to go haywire. While the majority of the people suffer from economic hardships, money is being spent on five-star hotels, sleek automobiles and colour television. But the main purpose in the coming days will be to make people conscious of this, which then would provide the basis for effecting a change in government at the Centre."

Planning Victory: While neither Gujral nor any other delegate liked to admit it directly, the fact that 1984 is an election year loomed large over the Calcutta conclave. It did a lot to hasten the process of united action that has been planned for February and March in the forms of observance of demands day all over the country and a national convention to discuss further programmes of action against the policies of the Central Government. Said Gujral: "It would be bad if the need for united action is felt only with a view to winning more seats at the elections. But then democratic elections are a part of realpolitik and also help us to get to the people."

Janwadi Dal leader Chandrajit Yadav was more forthright when he said: "During the discussions we have avoided talking of electoral adjustments because then the people could have said we are only interested in getting more votes. Our main purpose is how to go to the grassroots in a united manner and restore our credibility with the masses. If we are successful in this, then electoral adjustments would also become easier when the time for it comes."

Last fortnight it was this particular timing of the elections that appeared all important, both for the opposition parties present at the conclave and their declared single enemy, the Congress(I). What came out of the Calcutta conclave was more the belated realisation of a need for united action than the achievement of actual unity. Behind the unanimously adopted resolutions and speeches along the same vein lay some vital problems that could well prove decisive at the time of the general election.

For instance, the knotty question of relations with the BJP and the Lok Dal. While the leftists have made it clear that they would not touch the BJP with a bargepole, a sizeable section within the Janata Party and also the Telugu Desam as a whole do not agree with them on this. Telugu Desam leader and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao said: "By opposition unity I mean not only getting the BJP with us but also the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu which is today more with Indira Gandhi than us."

The prime minister being well aware of these differences, can very well throw a spanner by deciding on early polls which would leave the opposition parties with hardly enough time to cement the bonds of unity

PRADIP SAHA



Chandra Shekhar, Basu, Farooq and Rama R

achieved in Calcutta and get over their differences on such issues.

Getting Together: There is more in the scenario that the Congress(I) leadership can take advantage of. In between the conclave deliberations, leaders of the United Front parties met among themselves and agreed that they should merge into a single political party. The merger should come by March after DSP leader H.N. Bahuguna returns from the US.

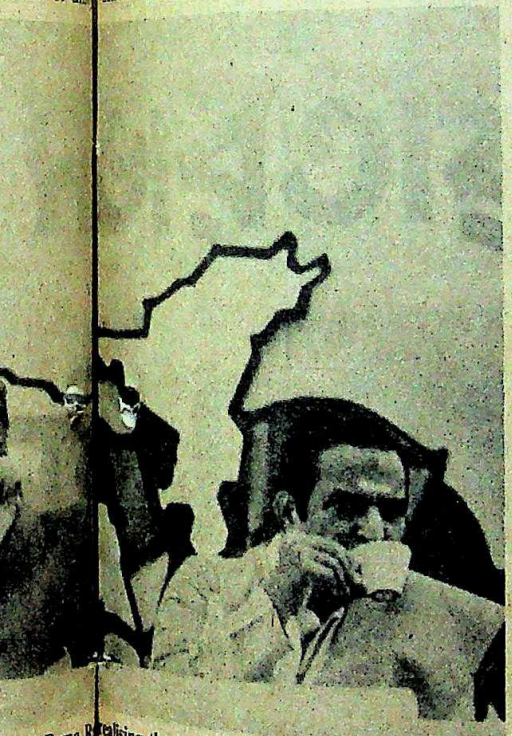
While that was good, there was agreement that the vital issue of leadership, which has so often harassed non-left parties in the past—the most glaring example being the ugly tussle within the Janata after its landmoth victory in 1977—had not been touched upon in these discussions and could well

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cause embarrassment all over again. All that Chandrajit Yadav, for instance, could hope for was: "Since we have elected Chandra Shekhar to be the chairman of the United Front, logic demands that he should also be leader of the new party. We have to learn from our past mistakes and there should be no further squabbles over personalities."

Fine words, but would such personalities as Morarji Desai, Bahuguna or Sharad Pawar agree to such an arrangement in an election year? Here also Indira Gandhi can well run away with the show by declaring early polls which would definitely turn all efforts into grabbing as many seats as possible, throwing to the four winds the more important question of achieving national opposition unity.



Realising the need for unity

The delegates in Calcutta could not have been unaware of this possibility. That they are seeking solace in a negative aspect of the situation was made clear by Basavapunniah who said: "Indira Gandhi's own party is today fragmented into various groups and she cannot have an election without setting her own house in order." He admitted, however, that "if we have to bargain for seats at this stage then the whole movement of bringing the left and democratic parties together will suffer."

Vast Opportunities: That is a set-back which the CPI(M) and its allies in the Left Front can ill afford. The CPI(M) was the last of the opposition parties to attend the first conclave at Vijayawada but was quick to realise the wonderful opportunity that was being provided to achieve its cherished two-fold thrust: isolating the "democratic" parties from "reactionaries" like the BJP and getting the former within its fraternal fold, and getting the fold to agree to its own slogans and voice them effectively.

So far the going has been good for the CPI(M) on both counts. For over a decade now the Marxists have been demanding a thorough reappraisal of Centre-state relations. Both at Srinagar and in Calcutta they had the satisfaction of others coming out in support of the same with equally strong voices. The glow of satisfaction was quite discernible on the face of Ashok Mitra, West Bengal finance minister, when briefing the press at the end of each day he read out such extracts as: ' "The International Monetary Fund loans have further added to the inflationary pressures and have subjected the nation to neo-colonialism" (K.P. Unnikrishnan, Congress(S)) and "direct taxes have been lowered and indirect taxes raised to help the rich and the food for work programme for the poor has been scuttled" (Chandra Shekhar of the Janata Party). The final triumph of the Marxists came when the conclave decided to have E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the party general secretary, to head a committee to keep in touch with all parties.

In Control: Even though leaders of the CPI(M)-led Left Front maintained a low profile all through the conclave, it was clear that they were still holding all the high cards. Elaborating on this, Basavapunniah said: "The non-left democratic forces are faced with a cruel choice. They know that if they go with either the Congress(I) or the RSS-dominated BJP then they will be gobbled up in no time. That leaves only the leftists who will allow them to maintain their separate existence. They have realised that without the left their battle for survival cannot be fought."

The non-left, however, had other views on this. Said Chandrajit Yadav: "When we decided at Srinagar that the Calcutta meet should seek to achieve a common approach on economic issues, the Marxists were at first hesitant as they feared this would throw up a lot of differences between them and us. But that did not happen and at drafting committee meetings, we often took a stronger line than them and prevailed." Basavapunniah's comment on this was: "We did not wish to rush the pace at any time as we found that from their own experiences the other parties were also veering round to our own conclusions." However, it looked as if at the end of the day, the Marxists could sit back satisfied at the knowledge that a firm left and democratic unity becoming a reality was very much on the cards.

Future Action: Having achieved this, the Marxists geared themselves for further consolidations and expansion of the areas of agreement. At the very outset Namboodiripad proposed a future meet at which the agreement on domestic, economic and political issues could be extended to the sphere of foreign policy also. The reason was clear: for quite some time now the Marxists and their leftist allies like the CPI, have been plagued by the fact that while they are at loggerheads with Indira Gandhi at home, they are one on foreign policy issues. This has often caused their basic opposition to the Congress(I) to be questioned also.

Now they want to rope in the others to share if not wholly at least partly their stands on such issues. The task should not prove too difficult. As Gujral explained: "The present foreign policy of the country has been evolved keeping in view the national interest and while some of the opposition parties may have points of difference they cannot but agree with the approach as a whole." And with the other participants in the conclave welcoming Namboodiripad's move to have an agreement on foreign policy also, it was clear that they also shared Gujral's optimism in this sphere.

As the conclave went along with the unity theme, the question cropped up as to whether it would not be a repetition of the Janata experiment. In the course of any discussion on the subject, the stress was always on the fact that while the "Janata Party had been a hurried response to a situation, the present unity bid is being worked out step by step and issue to issue", in an obvious attempt to avoid past mistakes.

Also this time there is a greater emphasis on evolving a common programme which, according to men like Chandrajit Yadav, was absent in the Janata Party: "There were towering personalities in the Janata but no programme and that is why it fell." It did appear that for the first time, a sizeable section of the Indian opposition had embarked on a systematic process of building up a national alternative programme to pose a clear-cut challenge to the ruling party.

Many of the parties who attended the Calcutta session are small and have realised that they will continue to be left out in the cold unless they came together to build up a united approach. As Makhan Paul of the Revolutionary Socialist Party said: "This is the most important thing that has been achieved in Calcutta and we are confident that the realisation will be translated into actual action." The process, however, takes time and in the end the only question that remained was: will Indira Gandhi's own inner party constraints be strong enough to provide the Opposition with this much-needed time?

—SUMANTA SEN

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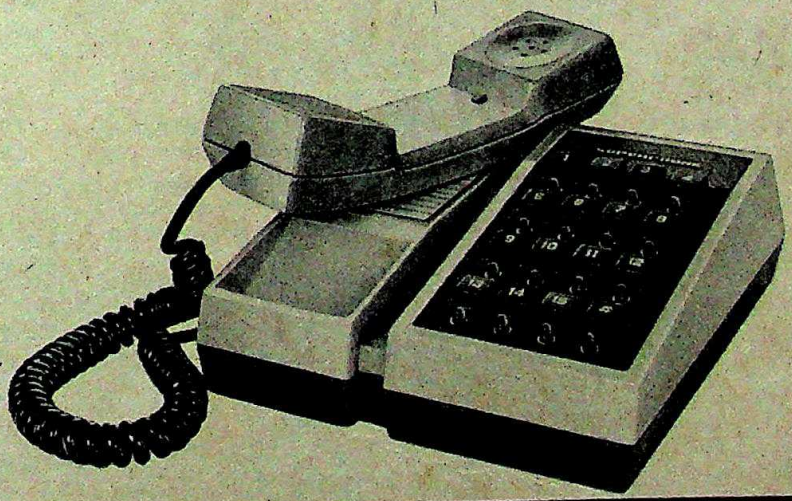
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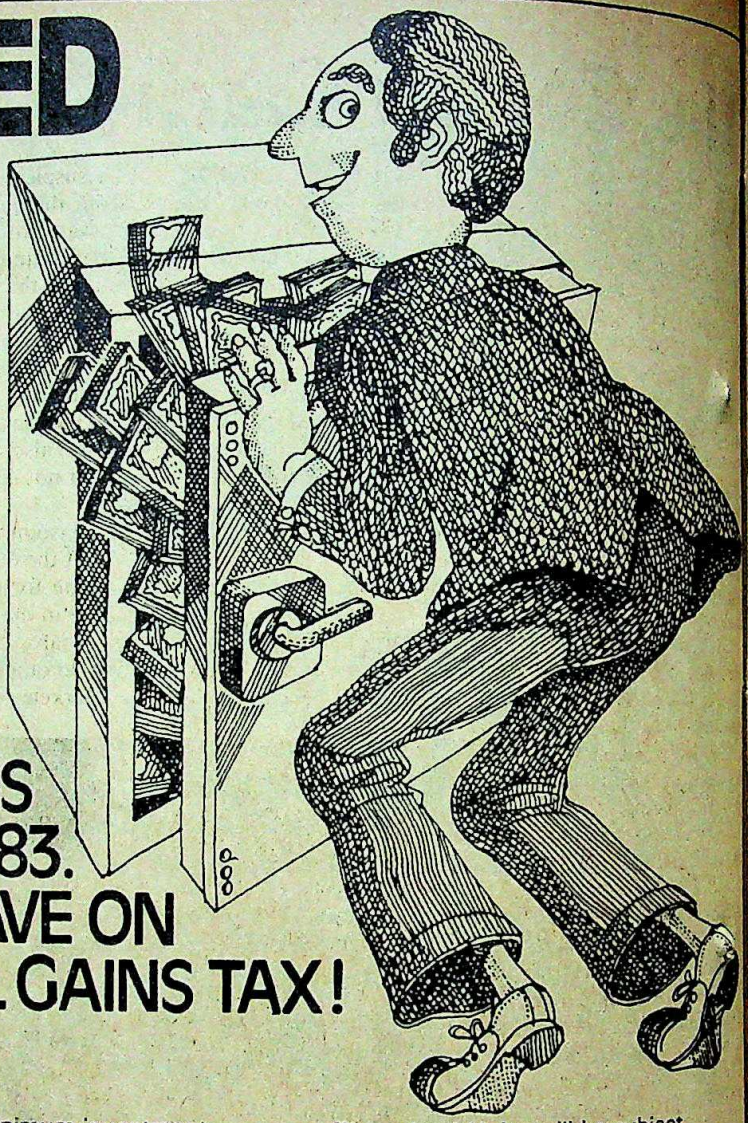
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NARCOTICS

The Cochin Catch

WHAT was it about Cochin that kept James Charles Howard, a retired photo journalist and self-confessed soldier of fortune, in the city for over one year? That is just one of a host of questions that US drug enforcement agents would like to ask Howard—if they ever get the chance. Howard has been under suspicion ever since the US Coast Guard intercepted the 200-tonne freighter Hetty off the coast of New Jersey in November. Stowed away on board beneath a cargo of timber from Indonesia was a consignment of 13 tonnes of hashish resin bricks worth nearly US $200 million (Rs 214 crore). It was one of the biggest international hashish hauls ever.

Where did the Hetty take on its cargo? Narcotics agents are still searching for more evidence on this but all the current indications are that it was loaded from Cochin. In support of this theory, drug enforcement agents are relying strongly on the evidence of a young Australian yachtsman and naval architect Brian Milgate. It was Milgate's tip-off that led narcotics agents to believe that there might be a consignment of drugs on board the Hetty.

Relentless Campaign: Milgate's determined crusade against what he believed was an international drug smuggling racket operating out of Cochin began almost exactly one year ago, quite literally by accident, when he was sailing to Britain with his girlfriend Alison McGuinness, to take part in the 1984 *Observer* transatlantic yacht race. Off the coast of Sri Lanka the rudder of his yacht, Tiger Rag, got tangled in illegal fishing nets. He tried to carry on despite the mishap but gave up when he ran into storms in the Indian Ocean that added to the damage. In the end he was forced to limp into Cochin on January 6, 1983, for repairs.

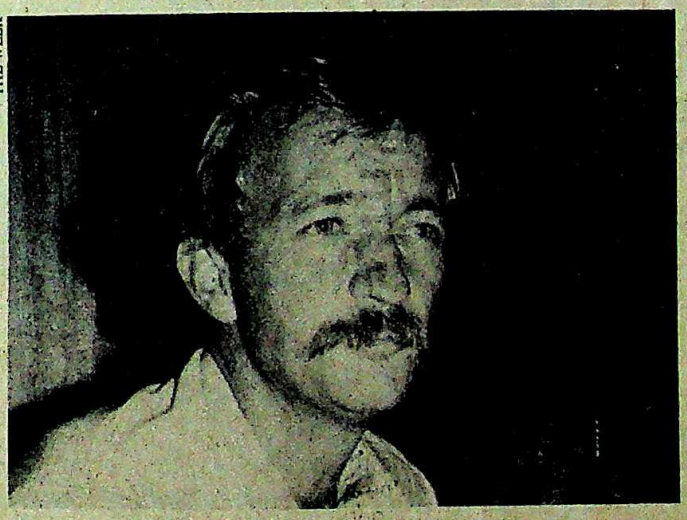
Within one week of arriving in Cochin he was hired by Howard to supervise repairs on board his ship, the Steppenwolf. Howard claimed to be living a life of comfortable retirement, sailing around the tropics in his yacht. He also says now that he has a contract with the Maldives Government for taking tourists out scuba diving.

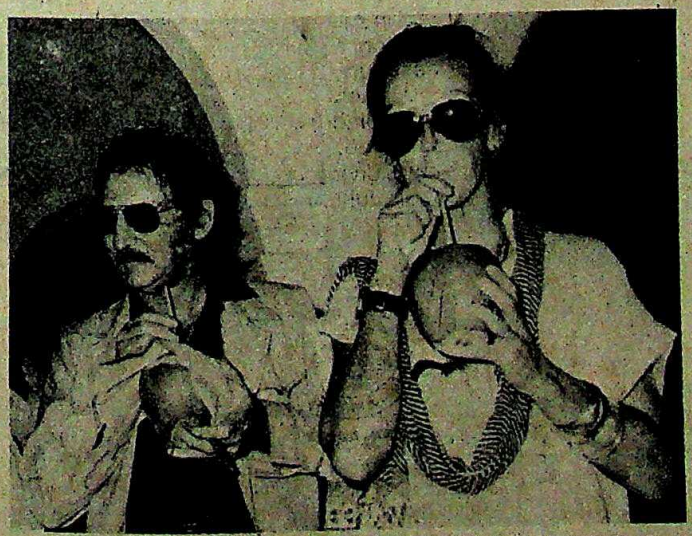
Milgate became suspicious of his new employer almost from the very beginning. For one thing he was intrigued by the numerous empty spaces and secret compartments in the hull of the Steppenwolf. For another he was also curious about the array of sophisticated electronic equipment on board, which included a satellite-linked navigator, a high-powered transmitter, equipment for underwater photography and a dark-room. Milgate also felt that his new boss' activities did not square with his description of himself.

In February 1983 soon after Milgate joined him Howard left the country, saying he was going to London for medical treatment. He returned later in the month by sea from Port Said on board the Hetty. He was accompanied by another man named Richard Merkeley. Merkeley is a man well-known to narcotics agents. Howard claimed that the Hetty was on its way from Port Said to Port Kelang in Malaysia. He said that the ship had been forced to stop in Cochin because of engine trouble.

Milgate was convinced that Howard had other reasons for returning to Cochin and alerted the customs about his suspicions. But a raid on the ship turned into a fiasco when the captain told customs officers that he was carrying enough high explosives on board to send the whole of Cochin up in flames. He added ominously that torchlight was enough to trigger off an explosion. In the end the customs officers retreated in disarray contenting themselves with fining the captain for bringing in explosives without clearance and fining Howard for contravening currency regulations. Later they also rummaged through the Steppenwolf and even gave Howard's room in Bolghatty Place Hotel a thorough once-over. At the end of all this they had failed to uncover the slightest trace of hashish and gave it up as a bad job.

THE WEEK





Brian Milgate (top) and James Howard with friend Jyl Gocher: riddle of the high seas

Desperate Measure: The failure of the raids left Milgate a shattered man. Howard had realised that Milgate had had a hand in the raid and sacked him after a heated dispute. The customs had also begun to dismiss him as a crank. At this point he took the desperate step of getting his side of the story published in the *Indian Express*. Howard, inevitably, reacted instantly, slapping libel suits on the *Express*, Milgate and McGuinness. As a result the Tiger Rag was impounded. By now Milgate was penniless and he decided that he had no option but to return to Perth.

Most people would have given up at this stage. But not Milgate. Even after getting back to Perth he devoted all his spare time to collecting information on drug smuggling. He tried to convince Australian narcotics agents about his thesis but with little success. He then dashed off a string of letters to drug enforcement agencies in London and Washington.

During all this time the Hetty was still wending its way through the high seas. After leaving Cochin it headed for Port Kelang. From there it went to Surabaya in Indonesia, to load timber that was to be taken to Philadelphia. But after leaving Surabaya it did not sail straight to Philadelphia. A secret log found on board the ship by the US Coast Guard showed that she

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The lure of lovely Himachal

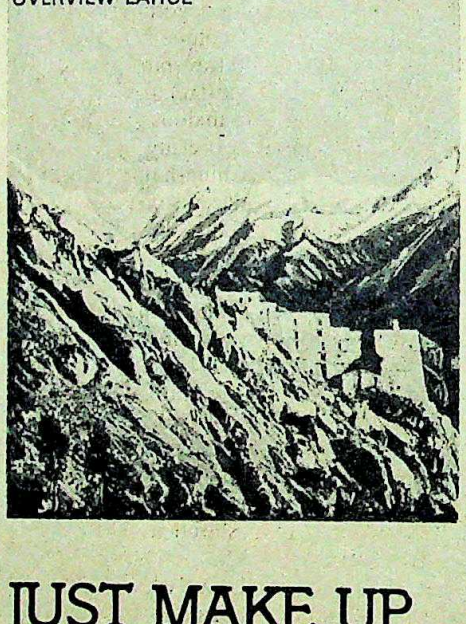
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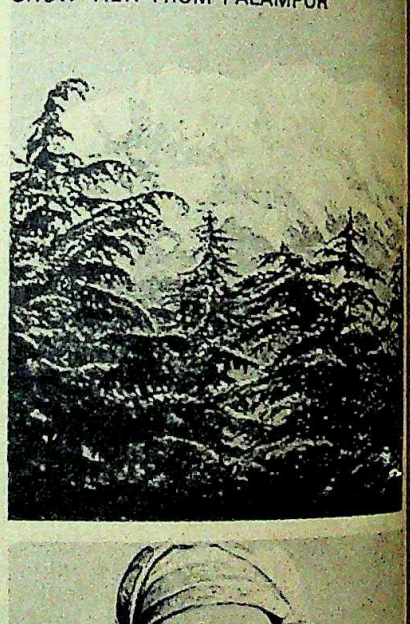
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HIMACHAL TOURISM



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had deviated from her course in answer to a mysterious radio message and sailed to within 60 miles of Cochin, which is when the hashish was loaded according to *The Sunday Times*, London. It only entered American coastal waters in the first week of November. By this time, thanks to Milgate's warning, the US Coast Guard was waiting for it.

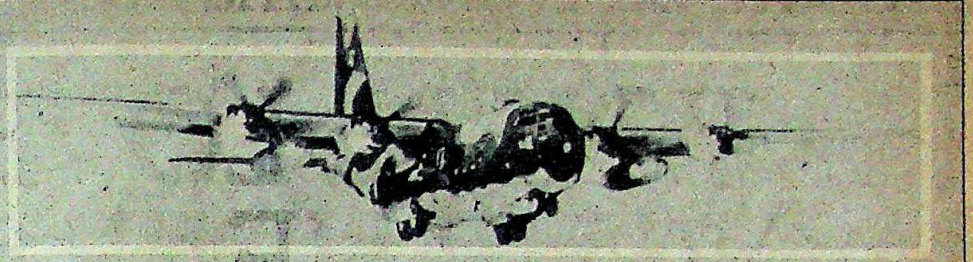
Continuing Investigations: The US drug enforcement agents are still trying to trace the masterminds behind the operation. So far they have only arrested the four crew members of the ship. They have also flown Milgate down to Washington in an effort to get more leads on the matter. Howard in the meantime has flown out of India. Before he left India he seemed unperturbed. When interviewed by INDIA TODAY he said: "I am an innocent with dirty hands. I was just a prospective buyer of the Hetty which is now owned by Richard Merkeley."

His version is at odds with the story told to *The Sunday Times* by the former captain of the Hetty, Fred Stanley, who claims that both men had told him that they were representing a firm named Primrose Investments. Stanley added that both men appeared to be fascinated by the layout of the Hetty, particularly its extra bulkhead and secret compartment. They are alleged to have said they would pay double the price offered by another buyer.

According to *The Sunday Times*, Howard has faced criminal charges in different parts of the world. However, he dismisses such reports saying that they are part of a campaign by the South African Bureau of State Security (BOSS) to discredit him. He also claims that his deportation from South Africa came after he had taken photographs of anti-apartheid demonstrators. He also admits that he was jailed once in Australia for brawling. For good measure he accuses Milgate of "being a real nut", and a member of the CIA. The hashish, according to his version, "is from Afghanistan and is part payment by the Afghan rebels to the CIA for supplying them with guns". He threatens to sue Brian's pants off". He is also threatening to sue *The Sunday Times*.

Whatever the final outcome of the case it has brought into sharp perspective the fact that Cochin is now becoming an increasingly popular staging point for drug smugglers. A few months ago heroin was found in tins exported from Cochin to Manchester that were supposed to contain crab meat. Despite these recent hauls there has been no effort by the Government to curb the traffic of drugs. The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence which is in overall charge of anti-smuggling operations does not have even a single officer in Cochin. Hopefully, the Howard case and its intriguing ramifications will help shut the stable door.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI in Cochin



The C-130: stalled deal

IAF

Clipped Wings

FOR A year now, it has been a tantalising on-again off-again situation. Suspense had been building up to an almost unbearable pitch about the fate of a deal being negotiated with the American aircraft company, Lockheed, for Hercules C-130 transport aircraft for the Indian Air Force (IAF). Indian defence planners have been anxious to acquire the American plane to beef up IAF's rapidly deteriorating medium-haul transport fleet. But highly-placed sources in South Block now confirm that the deal is finally off.

But the Government has managed to get around the problem, at least for the moment. The Argentinians are willing to part with a few old C-130s from their air force. Indications are that India has finalised the purchase of two or three such aircraft, which will be stationed in Argentina and will initially be used exclusively to maintain the small Indian scientific detachment at Antarctica (INDIA TODAY December 15, 1982).

Sources say the IAF, which was asked to take up the responsibility, found itself further handicapped when the powers who have air-to-air refuelling facilities in the region refused to let the IAF use them. Said a senior Defence Ministry official: "Flying C-130s or other similar aircraft to the Indian station on Antarctica is nearly 18 hours from the Argentine coast and no conventional medium of transport could have that kind of fuel carrying capacity."

Never short on ingenuity, the IAF has found a way out. The old Argentine C-130s will carry extra fuel tanks inside the fuselage, reducing the conventional load-carrying capacity to less than half. But, explained a pilot: "That makes no difference since the detachment at Antarctica consists of no more than 10 persons who do not need much supplies in terms of bulk." A detachment of IAF pilots and technicians currently flying the Soviet-made AN-12s has been selected to man the new station in Argentina. Meanwhile, scientists on the ice-cap are busy trying to level out a length of the surface to serve as a makeshift runway.

While the second-hand Argentinian aircraft of doubtful efficiency will perhaps solve the immediate problem of maintaining the Antarctica team, it leaves open the IAF's main transport problem. Until a few months ago, it seemed the Americans were themselves keen to sell the C-130s to India. In fact the manufacturers brought an aircraft to the Chandigarh airbase and demonstrated landings at Leh and other smaller airfields in the north-western Himalayan sector which are at present being served by the AN-12s. A detachment of the IAF pilots was even picked out for training in the US sometime later.

Extravagant Demands: But the deal fell through at the last moment not because of any pressures from the US Government but because the manufacturers asked for terms that the Government considered outrageous. Besides the high price, the manufacturers said they had no ready stock. In fact, they insisted that production would begin only after India placed the orders. Further, they wanted Indian pilots to be trained only on the aircraft manufactured for delivery to the IAF. Since this defeated the IAF's basic requirement of immediate strengthening of the transport fleet, the Government decided against buying them.

For the time being, therefore, the IAF is resigned to managing with its existing two AN-12 squadrons based at Chandigarh which generally never have more than six or seven airworthy aircraft at a time. Confessed an official in South Block: "There is nothing we can do now except wait for the Russians to begin delivery of the Ilyushin-76s." The giant jet transports are expected to meet the IAF's transport needs in the coming decade or so. The first of these, however, may still take nearly eight or nine months to land. It is believed that initially the IAF will set up only one IL-76 squadron. The two AN-12 squadrons will then be merged into one.

But till the Ilyushins come, the IAF will have to keep on attempting the impossible in keeping the old workhorses running, and commissioning new ones thousands of miles away in Antarctica.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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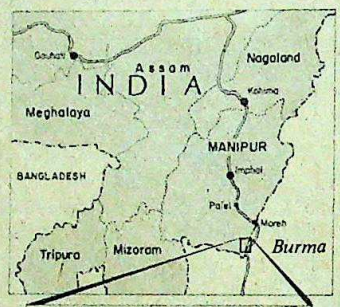
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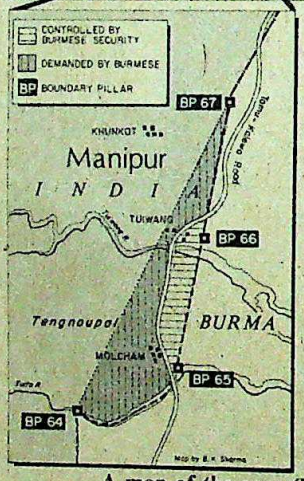
INDIA/BURMA

Barter on the Border

INSURGENTS are not the only Manipuris up in arms against the Centre. A group of equally committed Manipuris are waging yet another intense, though bloodless war against the Centre's plans to barter away Manipuri territories to appease Burma. Last fortnight, the group, led by the Manipur Cultural Integration Council and Maharaj Kumar Priya Barta Singh—a scion of the former ruling family of Manipur—had intensified their campaign further, following the visit of their representatives to the obscure village of Molcham and nearby hamlets along the Indo-Burmese border in the state's Tengnoupal district.

Molcham falls within the roughly 8 sq km area well within the Indian border that is now controlled for all practical purposes by the Burmese authorities. At recent meetings between the surveyors-general of India and Burma some kind of a barter for the area has been worked out, which has angered Manipuris. Said Maharaj Kumar Priya Barta Singh: "This is not like Aksai Chin where 'not a blade of grass grows'. This is a populated area. The people, nearly a thousand, say they are Indian and would like to remain so. What right does the Government have to barter them with Burma? The problem is we do not learn from past mistakes."







A map of the area (left) and border post 67: land grab

Strategic Location: Situated south of the Indo-Burma border township of Moreh, astride the historic Burma Road—along which bloody battles were fought between the British, the Japanese and the Indian National Army (INA)—Molcham (*see map*) is the nucleus of a tiny salient flanked by rivers Tuivang in the north and Tuito in the south. During the war, the allied command had decided to build a road parallel to the Manipur-Burma border in addition to the main highway. The southern, 70 km Tamu-Kalewa stretch of this road ran along Molcham, entering Indian territory at the bridge across the river Tuivang and cutting across it for three miles till it reached the Hamilton bridge over the Tuito river in the south.

According to old Survey of India maps the bridge over the Tuivang falls well within the Indian territory which the road traverses where border pillar No. 66 used to be. The pillar was mysteriously removed some time back. The de facto situation now is that since the road constitutes the Burmese lifeline in a region devoid of communication, the Indian Government is wary of denying them its use even if it passes through Indian territory. Said a senior bureaucrat in Imphal: "It is not necessary to deny Burmese the use of the road but it can be properly regulated." But in fact the Indian authorities have virtually ceded the salient to Burma: The lone BSF post is located 5 km to the east of Molcham.

Unfair Barter: The Manipur Government does not collect land revenue in Molcham now. The Burmese do. This was confirmed by the BSF patrols which visited Molcham recently. Admitted a top BSF official in Delhi: "After reports from our patrols we took up the matter with the Government. But it seems the Government wants us to keep away as talks are still on with the Burmese who have offered, in return, some territory near the village of Choru north of Molcham." This, Manipuri campaigners point out, is not a straight barter of land because the Molcham salient includes a lot of people who do not want to leave their homes.

While Manipur Chief Minister Rishang Keishing has taken up the matter with the Centre following strident demands in the Assembly. The state chief secretary and Brigadier Beant Singh, DIG (BSF) for Manipur and Nagaland, has also visited the village recently to give the Government an on-the-spot assessment of the situation. It is obvious from their findings that it may not be necessary for the Indian Government to even deny the Burmese the use of the road or of the salient to them. Said Priya Barta Singh: "If a corridor arrangement could work between east and west Berlin why can't something similar be worked out between two avowedly friendly countries? Even Indian engineers could build a good bridge across the Tuivang somewhere inside Burmese territory." Intelligence sources however point out that a number of Burmese surveyors have been scouring the jungles for another bridge on Tuivang without success.

Harassment: But, on the ground, the situation is not exactly friendly. Jamkhothang, the chief of Molcham—a majority of whose inhabitants are of the Kuki tribe—told the survey team that his people had often been harassed and even fired upon by the Burmese. In 1981, the Burmese took prisoner an officer and a jawan of the BSF who had strayed into the salient. They were later released as the BSF delachment on the Indian side threw a roadblock across the Tuivang bridge and its machine-gunners held off the Burmese traffic for a day.

The surveyors of the two countries have also not been able to fix the exact location of the non-existent border pillar No. 66 which the Manipur officials claim, should have been where the Tamu-Kalewa road turns sharply to the left towards the Tuivang bridge. The surveyors of the Manipur Cultural Integration Conference quote the local tribal chiefs as saying that the pillar had been removed in 1961 by Thangjakham, former chief of the Tuivang village who announced that his village was Burmese. A former Tuivang resident called Linkhoyam, who migrated deeper into India, claims he saw the Burmese remove the pillar along with the Burmese soldiers who took it away in an army truck. The conference spokesmen also allege that the Burmese authorities are forcing [illegible]

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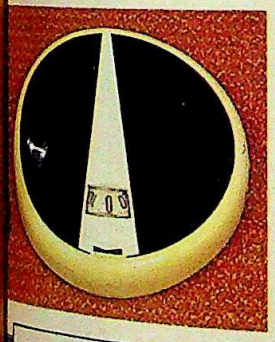
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FASHION GUIDE

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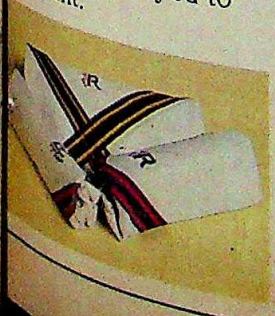
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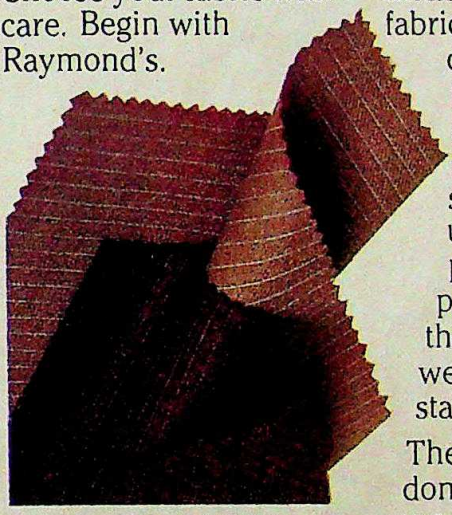


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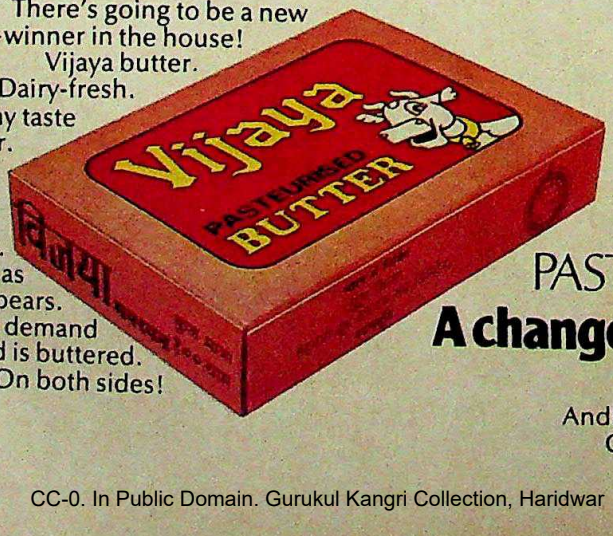
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citizens to flee from the area. Said Chief Minister Rishang Keishing: "There seems to be some problem but we are in touch with Delhi."

In any case, the people of Molcham and surrounding hamlets only seem to have benefited from their ambiguous geographical status. The region is virtually ignored by the border forces of both the countries, making it a smugglers' paradise. Besides the original Kukis, Molcham now has a sprinkling of Meiteis, Bengalis, Nepalis, even a few Malayalis and a Sikh, all in the "export- import business". Government officials say at least 20,000 to 30,000 Indian bicycles, which fetch a high price in Burma, are taken across this stretch of the Tamu-Kalewa road every year. The villagers' fortunes may change drastically if the two governments agree on a barter. And that is the prospect they dread.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Imphal

GUJARAT

Fighting Back



THE PROVERBIAL worm seems to be turning. In Bhavnagar district of Gujarat, some backward communities have had enough of the traditional exploitation by Rajputs. Last fortnight, 600 landless labourers of the backward Koli community moved overnight from their homes in Valar village to a bare arid patch of land in nearby Saltanpar village. In a similar case on December 22, 23 Harijan families of Bhojpara village in the same district had shifted to a dry patch of land in Gundala village 4 km away.

The Kolis and the Harijans say that the Rajputs exploit them as cheap labour and their women as sex objects. Says Jethabhai Rathod, who was a member of the Bhojpara panchayat: "We decided to leave as the atrocities and humiliation were only increasing. Why else must we live here like beggars? The Government can take our houses. We will live here with dignity."

New Spirit: A few months ago, it was in Bhojpara that the movement began. With unprecedented determination, the Harijans had got together to lodge a police complaint against a young Rajput, Kanuba Bachubhai. Swaggering into a Harijan house drunk, Bachubhai had beaten up the inmates and broken their earthenware when they refused his demand that they work in his fields.

The Kolis of Valar had moved because, with an abnormally high population of 80 Rajput families there, they found the going unbearable. A Koli labourer, Jairam, says: "We were forced to work in Valar on lands belonging to Rajputs who did not even pay us minimum wages—never over eight rupees a day after nearly ten hours of work. There were other villages around where labourers were better paid, but we were never allowed to work outside. All these years, we listened to them and worked at times without being paid. It cannot go on."

According to District Collector G.K. Dudhani, the Kolis were to be shifted in any case, as their previous homes were in a low-lying area on the banks of the Bagad river, which is prone to floods.

A number of Rajputs, known locally as Darbars, have not yet reconciled to the land reforms of the mid-1950s. Though legally the land now belongs to the tiller, many Rajputs still manage to cling to the social and economic rights they enjoyed in their fiefs in the pre-independence Bhavnagar state.

Some of them continue to demand —and get—huge sums under various pretexts, often calling them 'taxes'. Last fortnight, three Rajputs—Bharatsinh Haluba, Jagdishsinh Haluba and Vikramsinh Haluba —arrested under the National Security Act, confessed that they had extorted Rs 1.8 lakh from 29 families during the past few years.

Gross Exploitation: Said a Koli, Bachu Sadal: "We have had to pay for anything and everything that can be imagined. Some of us have even paid a few thousand rupees to the Rajputs when we bought some goats. In short, any transaction we entered into was an excuse for the ex-rulers to ask for their cut."

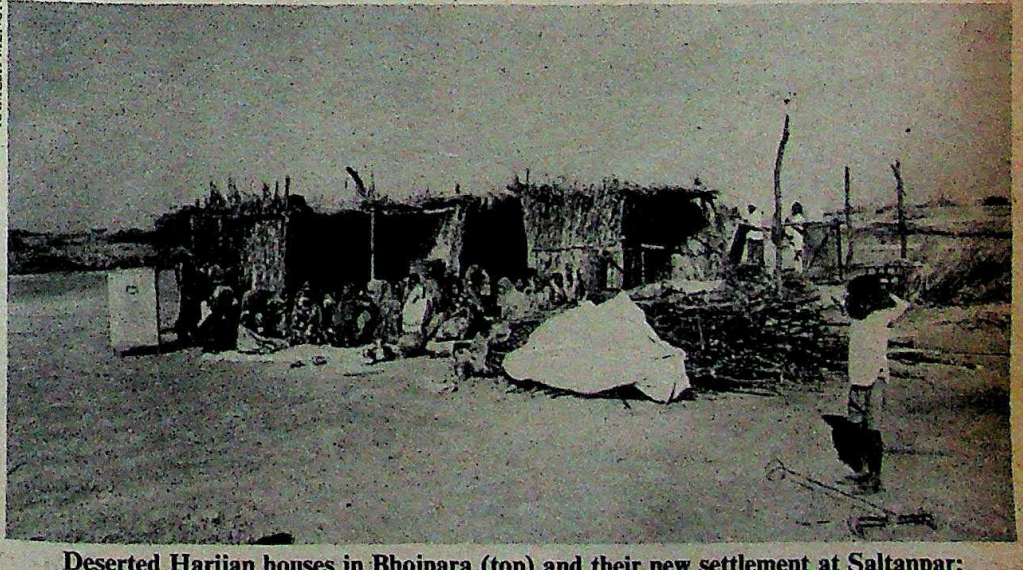
Madhabhai Shibabhai, who owns about 30 acres of land, paid Rs 30,500 to Bharatsinh as 'tax'. And Madhubhai Becharbhai says: "I bought 12 acres of land three years ago for Rs 6,000. Soon after, Bharatsinh forced me to pay him Rs 5,500 as tax."

For decades, the backward castes accepted the sway of the Rajputs out of fear, combined with a sense of allegiance. But now there is a distinct air of confidence, even defiance. Says one of them: "No more money will ever be paid. Initially, we refused to lodge complaints as the zamindars are very

RAMESH MENON



RAMESH MENON



Deserted Harijan houses in Bhojpara (top) and their new settlement at Saltanpar: showing a new determination

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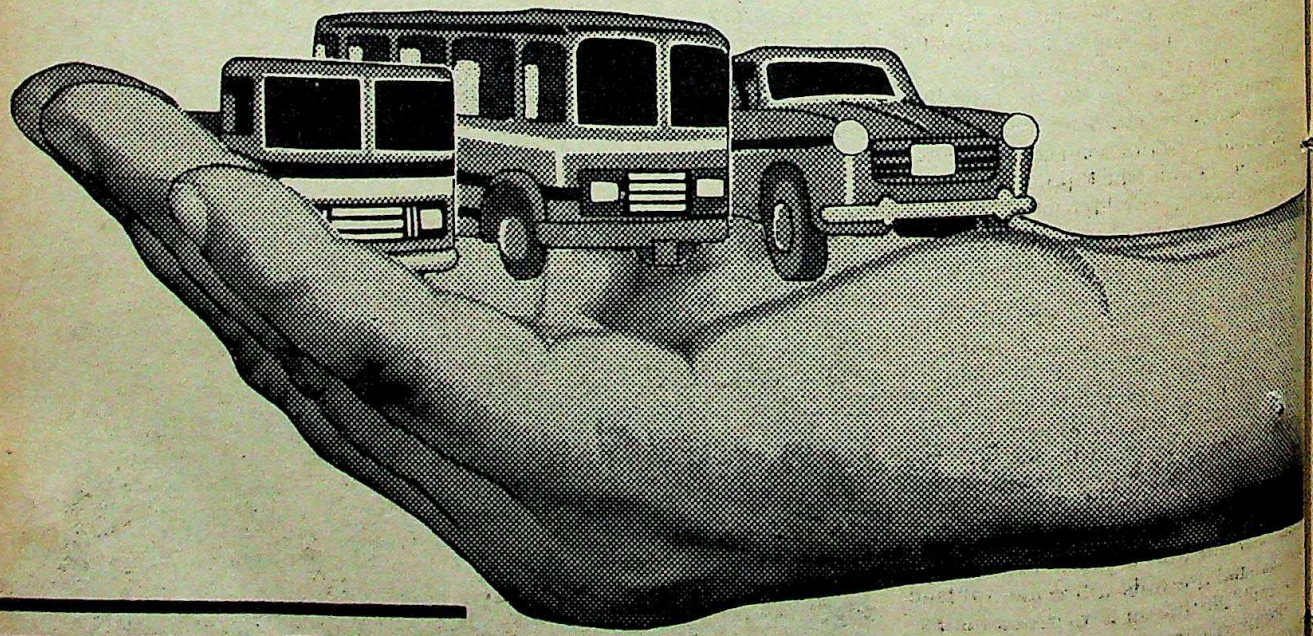
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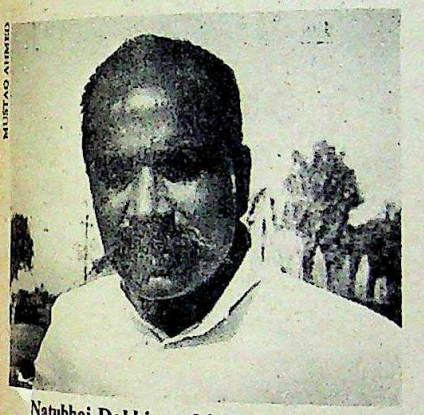
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influential and most of the police officers are Rajputs. We have planned to stay together and fight even if it may cost a few lives."

One measure of their success is the fact that sexual exploitation by the zamindars has ceased. In the past, they often forced their advances on the poor women of the area. One landless labourer, Jaga Laxman, tearfully narrated how Rajputs in his village asked his wife to visit them and promised Rs 15 if she did. They even demanded that if he migrated, he should leave his wife behind.

Political Awareness: Under the leadership of Natubhai Dabhi, Congress(I) MLA from Palitana, who is also a Koli, they took their problems to Gandhinagar. In response to their pleas, Chief Minister Madhavsinh Solanki asked the Vigilance Branch to investigate. The problem was further brought



MUSHTAQ AHMED

Natubhai Dabhi: seeking a solution

into public focus when Jinabhai Darji, executive director for the 20-point programme, visited the area and bluntly stated that the Darbars' reign of terror must stop.

About 7,000 people attended a public meeting of Kolis at Gorkhi on January 22, at which Dabhi called for a concerted struggle against exploitation. The Rajputs are predictably upset at these developments. Says Congress(I) MLA Kiritsinh Gohil: "Dabhi is only trying to build a political base for himself. This is a political stunt."

The Rajputs of Bhojpara also deny any exploitation. Says Ranjitsinh Gohil, a retired police officer and local leader: "These reports are full of exaggeration. The Rajputs are a very decent race. If we have been sexually exploiting them, why did they not complain? Can they prove it? All Harijan women were very happy here." Adds Bhatsinh Gohil, another village elder: "The Harijans left because of greed to get government aid and if possible a free plot of land. They could do this only by defaming us."

But the determined and defiant faces at the Gorkhi meeting gave the lie to any opportunist motives. And the next few months are likely to show the fruits of this new-found courage.

— RAMESH MENON in Bhavnagar

KARNATAKA

Confident Moves



KARNATAKA Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde has out-manoeuvred his opponents again. Hegde proved his mettle last fortnight by moving the first ever confidence motion in the Assembly, which put an end to the uncertainty and doubts of the Government's stability and caught the Congress(I) napping. The vote of confidence was pushed through by a margin of 128 votes to nil in the 225-member Assembly, a day after the session began. The Opposition's—82 members of the Congress(I) and six members of the Kranti Ranga—attempts to stall the confidence motion on procedural grounds remained unsuccessful.

However, everybody agreed that Congress(I) efforts to topple the Hegde Government were by no means over. Admitted Hegde: "They will never stop. By and large, they are a shameless lot. They are incapable of learning, nor do they believe in any principles. They will continue and I am prepared for it."

More Problems: Though Hegde has had much to contend with, there seems more to follow. The Kannada language issue, a major cause for the exit of the Gundu Rao ministry, has begun to create problems. The issue now is the Government's repealing in November last year, a rule passed by the previous government in April 1982, requiring linguistic minorities seeking selection to class III posts to pass the Kannada language test.

The Hegde Government had by repealing the rule, extended the facility enjoyed by class I and II employees to class III employees of passing the Kannada test within the two years probation period. Only class IV posts required a speaking and writing ability in Kannada. Following Labour Minister Azeez Sait's suggestion, the Hegde Ministry chose this step in order to protect minority interests and the welfare of 50 lakh Kannadigas living in other states, particularly in the neighbouring ones, where this two-year facility is allowed.

In protest, the Rajkumar Abhimanigala Sangha (Rajkumar Fans Association)—called a 10-day hunger strike, ending with a near total Bangalore bandh on January 18, which sparked off some ugly communal clashes. Rejecting the Opposition's demand for judicial enquiry into the violence, Hegde maintained that with the arrest of 350 people the day before and 133 on the day of the



MUSHTAQ AHMED

RAMESH MENON



MUSHTAQ AHMED

Police chase agitators during the bandh and (top) Rajkumar: a vexing issue

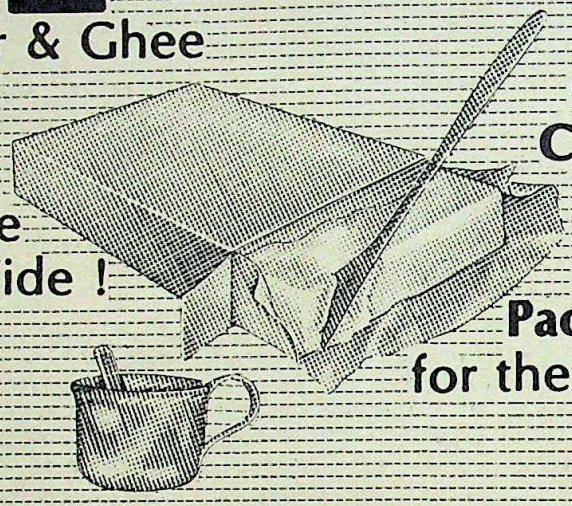
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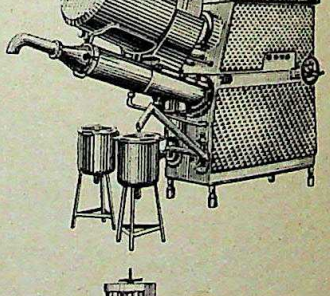
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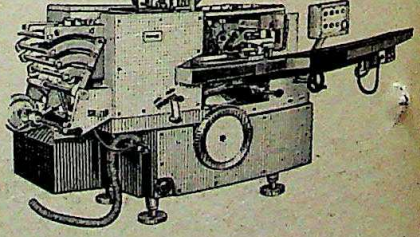
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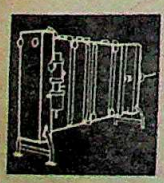
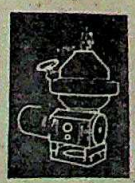
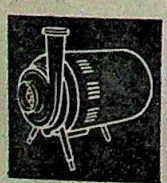


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Ugranarasimhappa (inset) and wife Gangavva: convoluted story

bandh, he had effectively contained the ill-effects.

Difficult Situation: But this is to be seen, for matinee idol Rajkumar at a press conference on January 24 reiterated the stand of his fans for making compulsory a Kannada exam for class III and IV employees. In a letter to Hegde he rejected the chief minister's offer to head a committee to look into the issue afresh and arrive at an amicable solution. Even a meeting with the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran, who had expressed his fears of attacks on Tamils in the state, would not swerve him from his stance, Rajkumar maintained. A state-wide bandh to press for their demands, scheduled for January 25, has only been postponed temporarily he said. Adding strength to their demands, two other organisations, the Sahiti Kalvidara Balaga and the Kannada Kriya Samiti have decided to hold a joint meeting on February 5, to press for the same.

Rajkumar who failed to answer many questions on the bandh, disclaimed any knowledge about the ransacking of the office of Kannada Nadu politician A.K. Subbiah. Recounting the violence Subbiah said: "Even the dog that used to lie around near the office was kicked and beaten." Official files were torn, telephone smashed and Muslim partymen thrashed. Though earlier he had invited Rajkumar to join and lead his party, Subbiah rhetorically declaimed: "Who is this Rajkumar? Is he a Khomeini? He is by temperament a Nazi. This will be his end."

Embarrassing Controversy: As though all this was not enough, the issue of a defecting Janata MLA created another controversy and added to all Hegde's problems. On January 11, the Pavagada MLA Ugranarasimhappa announced his defection to the Congress(I) at the residence of senior Congress MP H.N. Nanje Gowda. But the next day, his wife Gangavva complained to the police in Tumkur, the district headquarters, that she feared her husband had been abducted. Armed with a magisterial search warrant, the police besieged Nanje Gowda's house at crack of dawn next day. The MP who denies having seen the warrant, promptly called the press, other Congress(I) partymen and Kranti Ranga members, and refused to let the police search the house. Gangavva met both the governor and the chief minister but had to return to Tumkur without seeing her husband.

Inspite of demonstrations, dharnas outside the Assembly and a petition for an enquiry, the Janata party had to concede their loss of an MLA to the Congress(I). In triumph the Congress(I) gathered the press to meet Ugranarasimhappa, Gangavva and their nine-month-old daughter, Dakshayini at Nanje Gowda's house, where the MLA attacked the Janata Party for misleading his wife about her husband's position.

Another potential area of discontentment was the state Raitha Sangha (Farmers Association), are on the warpath again. Even then, Hegde's triumph in the Assembly should see him smoothly through the budget session at least with some kind of temporary relief from the bogey of being toppled.

—K. BHANUMATHI

DELHI

Coup de Club

FEW BUREAUCRATS have been privileged to enjoy the kind of high-profile exposure afforded to Kunwar Natwar Singh, the aggressive external affairs secretary, in recent months. No lingering image of the Non-aligned meet or the Commonwealth confab can be complete without his all-pervasive presence playing the super efficient civil servant like a character out of *Yes Minister*. Clutching important-looking papers in one hand and brushing back his unruly cow-lick with the other, Natwar gave every impression of a man on the make, determined to grab his place in history. A grateful government even saw fit to confer him with a Padma Bhushan last week.

But there was one section of the citizenry who clearly viewed that accolade as ill-reposed. A fair-sized chunk of the membership of Delhi's prestigious Gymkhana Club are still shell-shocked at the manner in which Natwar acquired another comparatively minor feather in his crowded trilby—the presidentship of the club. Ten days after the election of Natwar, unopposed as it turned out, the cavernous interior of the Gymkhana still echoes with whispered incredulity at what eventually transpired to be the most controversial elections in the club's long and distinguished history.

Startling Allegations: In a highly politicised drama, Natwar and his fellow-committee members were accused of using unwarranted pressure tactics to muscle aside the other two contenders for the presidentship —Sudarshan Aggarwal, secretary-general of the Rajya Sabha and Kanwaljit Singh, member of the Delhi Development Authority. Allegations were freely aired that Natwar had got 1, Safdarjung Road, situated appropriately enough, opposite the club premises, to ram through his election. Whatever may be the truth the other contenders meekly dropped out of the race.

When confronted, Natwar bristled with righteous indignation and challenged anybody to prove that the prime minister's house was involved. Although, none of them made the charge publicly, one of the contenders who withdrew alleged that he received phone calls threatening him with income tax raids unless he scratched himself from the race.

Tarnished Image: In the run-up to the elections, a series of cocktail parties were thrown to canvass support from members. The invitations openly announced that the purpose was to meet the members of the proposed committee. Rumours of the impending battle had been circulating long before the election was gone through. Originally a jealously-guarded bastion of senior civil servants and defence personnel, the club in the last five years has been witnessing a steady influx of civilians, mainly businessmen. The trend has certainly altered the Victorian ambience of the club. Many of the new members were obviously using the club to make crucial contacts.

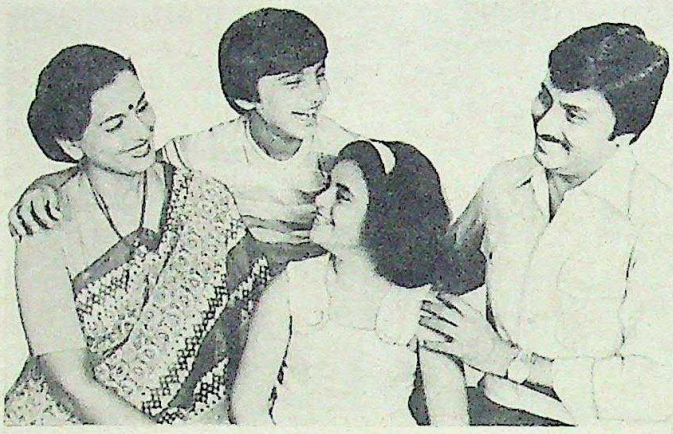
In the smoke-shrouded card rooms where club rules restrict stakes to 25 paisa a point, hard-core gamblers were flagrantly playing for sky-level limits. The confrontation had to come. The crunch came when three prospective members, all senior retired servicemen, were blackballed by the previous committee. Immediately, the bureaucrat-defence lobby banded together with the avowed intention to "restore to the club its old untarnished image". At least so they said in a circular issued to all members 11 days before the election, in itself an unprecedented event. Gymkhana Club elections used to be civilised affairs with the lobbying confined to backstage and the long knives well concealed. Which is why the unusual step of issuing a circular containing the list of a representative committee headed by Natwar along with a plea for support raised considerable eyebrows. The 16-member list contai-

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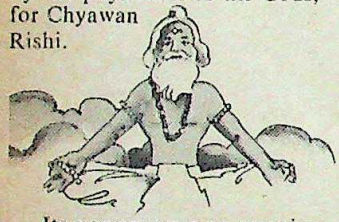
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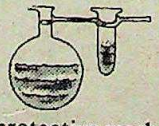
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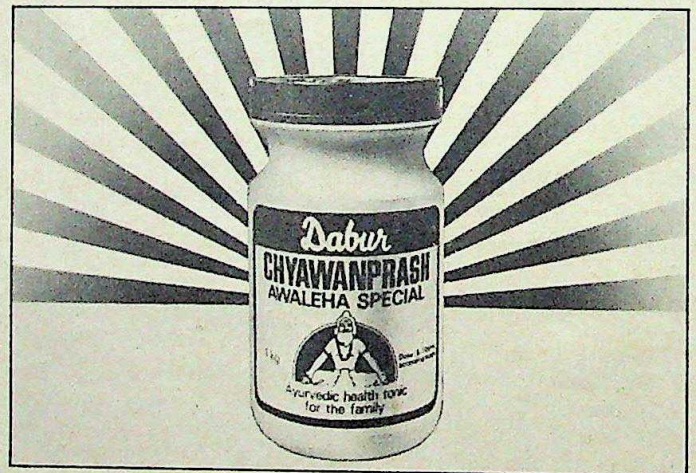


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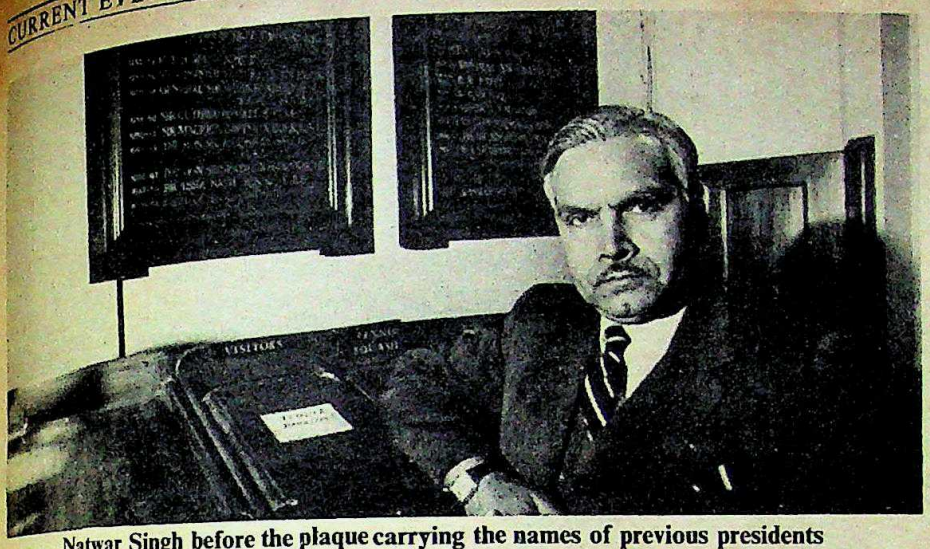
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Natwar Singh before the plaque carrying the names of previous presidents

ned the names of five bureaucrats, six serving or retired defence personnel and five others including Ashok Nehru, son of Jammu & Kashmir Governor B.K. Nehru.

Unprecedented Moves: If the circular was unprecedented so was the return fire. In an indignant retaliatory measure, the business lobby issued their own circular to members warning against "cheap propaganda" and the "humiliation" of a list of committee members being proposed before the election. "The credibility of our club," charged the circular, "has been reduced to that of a dhaba". It then went on to detail the lavish parties being held and the pressure being employed to influence the voting. The circular also alleged that the three service chiefs had been approached to influence fellow service members but they had refused to do so.

In the end, the counter-offensive proved abortive. As the voting pattern revealed, most members opted for a new look committee and only three of the 16 names on the Natwar list were not elected. Obviously, even without the alleged manipulations, the members had seen enough of the old guard that has been running the club. Some club officials have been on the committee for years with very little to show for their efforts to improve the club. In fact, the Gymkhana has been going steadily downhill and it will take all of Natwar's not-inconsiderable diplomatic skills to return the club to its original prestige and prominence.

The clean-up has already begun. Natwar and his three-piece pinstripes are daily fixtures at the club whether it is inspecting kitchens and bathrooms or policing the cardroom. But after the glitter of NAM and CHOGM, it does seem like quite a comedown.

—DILIP BOBB

PILOT BABA

Deep Faith

FEW PEOPLE in Agra are likely to forget the dramatic events of that Sunday. At one in the afternoon of January 22, 46-year-old Pilot Baba, a retired wing commander-turned-sanyasi, emerged from his underground samadhi, having spent 75 hours entombed in the dark with only a wooden cot, a trishul, a torch and a bell for company. As the baba's chelas clawed at the mud to release their guru from his cell, the 30,000-strong crowd which had jammed the 1.4 acre patch of land started chanting "Om namah shivah" which gradually rose to a crescendo, and a wild cheer went up as the baba eventually emerged from the ground. Quickly wrapping a saffron lungi around himself, the bearded sanyasi held up his arms like a prize-fighter acknowledging applause.

Kapil Singh, called Pilot Baba because he was formerly an air force wing commander, seemed to be living up to the image of the new generation of publicity-conscious sanyasis. The pre-samadhi build-up said that it was part of a campaign to focus public attention on world peace in an effort to lift society onto the path of truth and non-violence.

The samadhi shot into the limelight after the Additional District Magistrate S.C. Rastogi clamped Section 144 on the city last fortnight, banning any public gathering of more than six people. The President of the DCC(I) Rajaram Pippal, promptly filed a writ petition challenging the district administration's move. But even as the Sessions Judge Parmatma Swarup vacated the operation of the prohibitory orders on January 19, the baba had entered the samadhi at 10 a.m.

KUNAL VERMA



Baba on the Samadhi: religious drama

The 20 cubic metre pit was dug on a disputed piece of land opposite Meher cinema theatre. The pit, sealed completely by a large asbestos sheet and corrugated iron planks, looked like any other ordinary room. The baba, in case his life was threatened from lack of oxygen, was to hammer the top of the pit with his trishul, where his chelas were on a round the clock vigil. Calling themselves the Akhil Vishva Shanti Sansthan, the organisers had launched a massive advertising campaign, painting the entire city with graffitti which proclaimed the baba's feat.

For three days, the flower-decked mound of mud was the centre of attraction. On cycles, rickshaws, tongas and on foot, a steady stream of people converged at the samadhi—some out of curiosity, some for darshan. By Sunday morning, nothing was going to stop the thousands of people from being present. Under the supervision of a strong police contingent which included a Provincial Armed Constabulary battalion, by midday the ground was packed with people.

The baba emerged at precisely 12.59 p.m. looking none the worse from his long sojourn. In the speeches that followed in Hindi and English, the baba called on the people to shun materialism and follow the path of non-violence. Despite the fact that his speech was hard to follow over the blaring loudspeakers, the baba drew cheers and applause every time he raised his arms. The climax came when a sortie of nine Canberra fighter-bombers practising for the Republic Day fly-past flew overhead, leaving the crowd delirious. The belief and faith were touching, and aptly summed up the feelings which swept through Agra after the feat of the underground man. —KUNAL VERMA in Agra

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SIKKIM

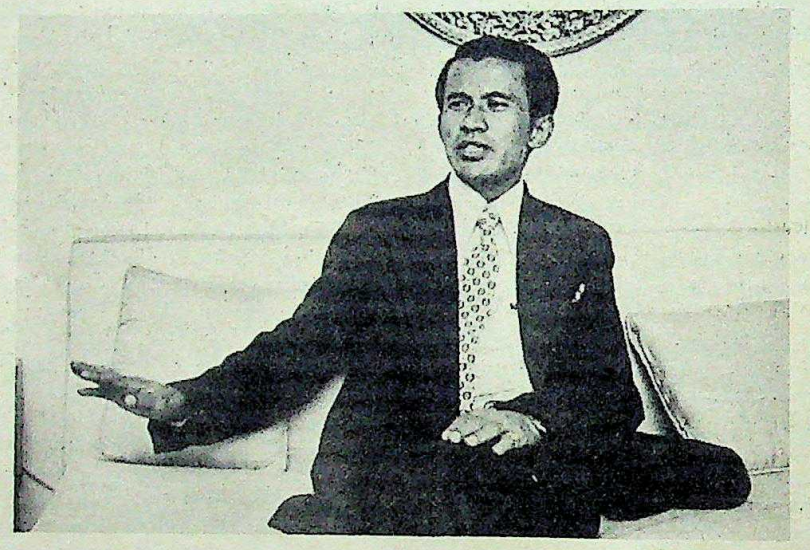
Leadership Squabbles

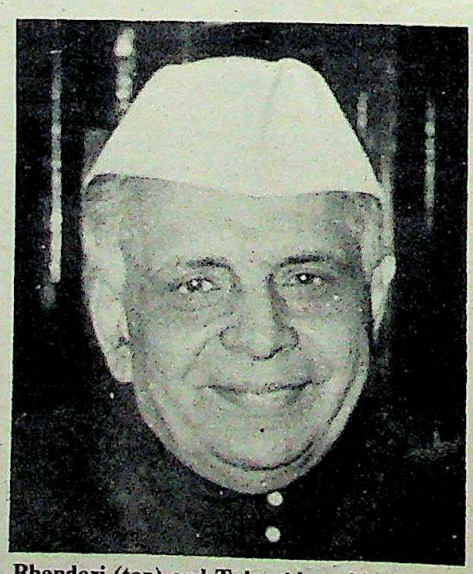
IF STATE governments were dismissed purely on the basis of an adverse report from the governor, the axe should have fallen long ago on the four-year-old Sikkim Government headed by Nar Bahadur Bhandari. The running slanging match between Governor Homi Talyarkhan and Bhandari reached a climax last fortnight when Talyarkhan in a 20-page secret report to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Home Minister P.C. Sethi charged the state Government with inaction and maladministration and reaffirmed the growing dissension within the ruling Congress(I). Says the report: "Under the present leadership, party interests are ignored, anti-national activities were indulged in particularly in the form of pan-Napalese stances of the chief minister, administration was hardly functioning and no developmental activity to speak of in spite of the massive Central funds, was taking place."

The report comes as the epilogue to an exhausting two-year battle between Talyarkhan and Bhandari. While Bhandari has on many occasions attacked the governor for his style of functioning—issuing orders directly to officials, asking for files relating to important matters, feeding misleading information to the Centre about the state's development and running a parallel government—Talyarkhan alleges that Bhandari is not interested in the state's development. As the tension between the two was causing administrative jitters the Central Government was forced to intervene to patch up the differences. As a result of these efforts, Bhandari made an announcement in New Delhi on November 5, 1983, that the problems between him and the governor had been sorted out.

Acrimonious Charges: But barely a month later the chief minister flew down to New Delhi and demanded immediate transfer of the governor for "interference in state matters". On December 23 Bhandari said: "The governor is conspiring to topple my government and is sending delegations here to complain against me." Bhandari even termed Talyarkhan as an 'obstacle' in the industrial development of the state by alleging that the governor had cautioned the Centre against giving licences for large industrial units to be opened up in the state.

Not surprisingly, Talyarkhan's latest report to the Centre is obviously aimed at refuting Bhandari's allegations. Says the report, "It has also been noticed that whenever his (Bhandari's) position is shaky...he tries to divert attention by making the governor the target of his attack in the press in spite of the home minister's warnings."





Bhandari (top) and Talyarkhan: bitter feud

In an indirect warning to the Centre that Bhandari's continuation in office would not be in the Congress(I)'s interest the report says: "The political situation cannot be said to be happy as there is growing resentment among all sections of the public including some Nepali castes also against the conduct of Bhandari. The Bhutias and Lepchas, including almost all their ministers have turned wholly against him."

Because elections to the 32-member state Assembly are only eight months away the governor has also hinted that Bhandari may lose his majority in the legislative party because of Congress(I) dissidents joining hands with the Opposition. "Those elected members who are opposed to Bhandari are on the border line of clinching a majority but do not seem to have attained the objective, still lingering between 12 and 13 in the total party strength of 26 in the Assembly of 32 members," he says.

In a hard-hitting comment on Bhandari's style of functioning the governor says that "a number of senior bureaucrats have also been feeling that they have been reduced to glorified clerks. Ministers say that they have no say in the matters pertaining to their own departments as certain people have direct access to the chief minister. They say that important decisions taken never come up before the Cabinet. Now everyone is worked up about his public announcements of choice of candidates for the next election without consulting the high command."

Important Appointment: Till last week the Central Government had not publicly taken sides, but from the governor's report it is clear that the chief minister has not been consulted on important decisions like the appointment of Justice Mohan Lal Srimal as chief justice of the Sikkim High Court. According to convention, the chief minister's prior sanction is required for inducting any one as chief justice. But Bhandari's concurrence was not taken and he was not present in Raj Bhavan when Srimal was sworn in.

Defending the move Talyarkhan says: "Only Bhandari remained absent having sent earlier a letter of apology. It may also be mentioned that while the governor gave his concurrence at once when consulted as required under Article 217 of the Constitution, Bhandari, in spite of being requested also to concur refused to do so.

The cold war between the chief minister and the governor cannot but be embarrassing for the Centre. But since Sikkim is a Congress(I)-ruled state, it will be interesting to see whose side the Government eventually takes.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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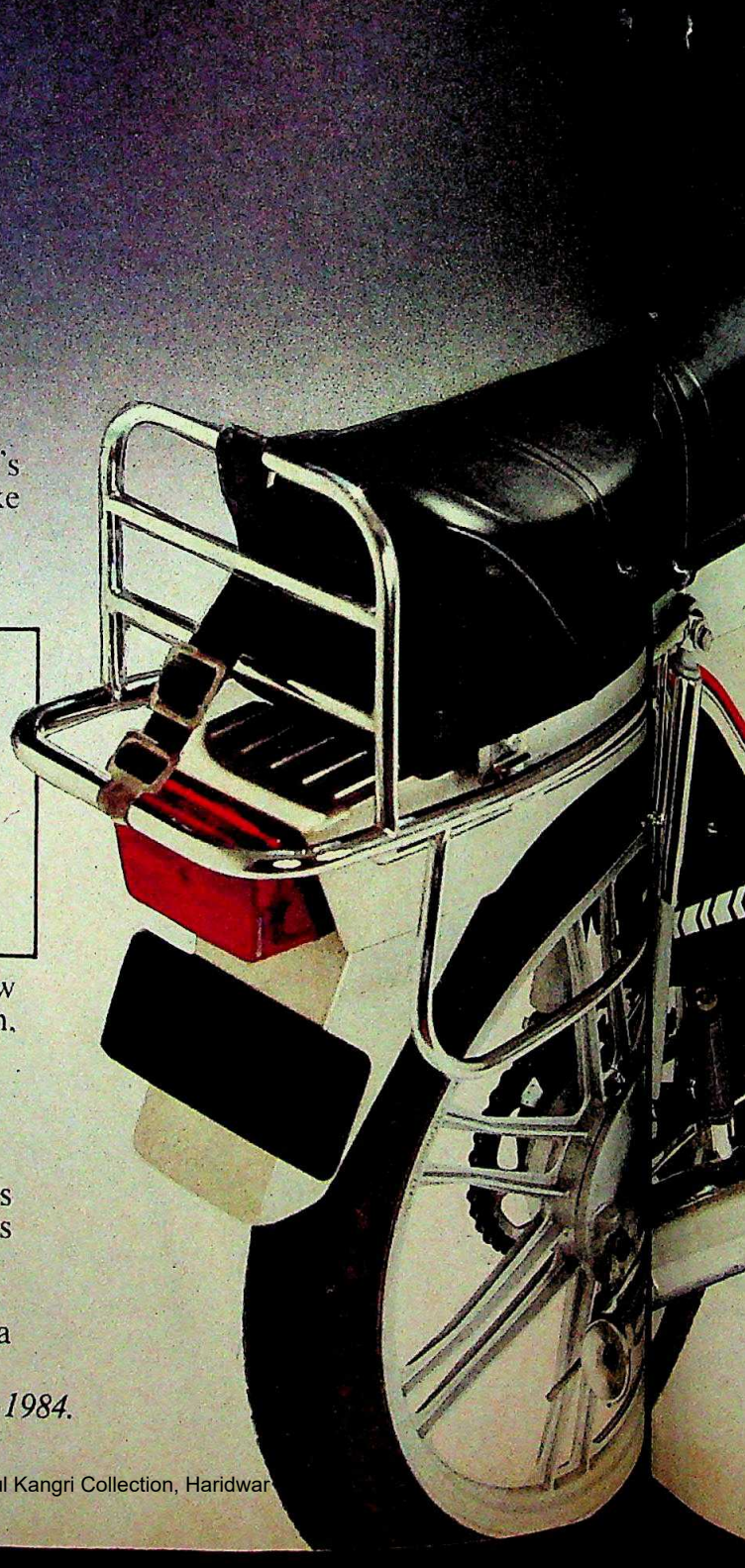
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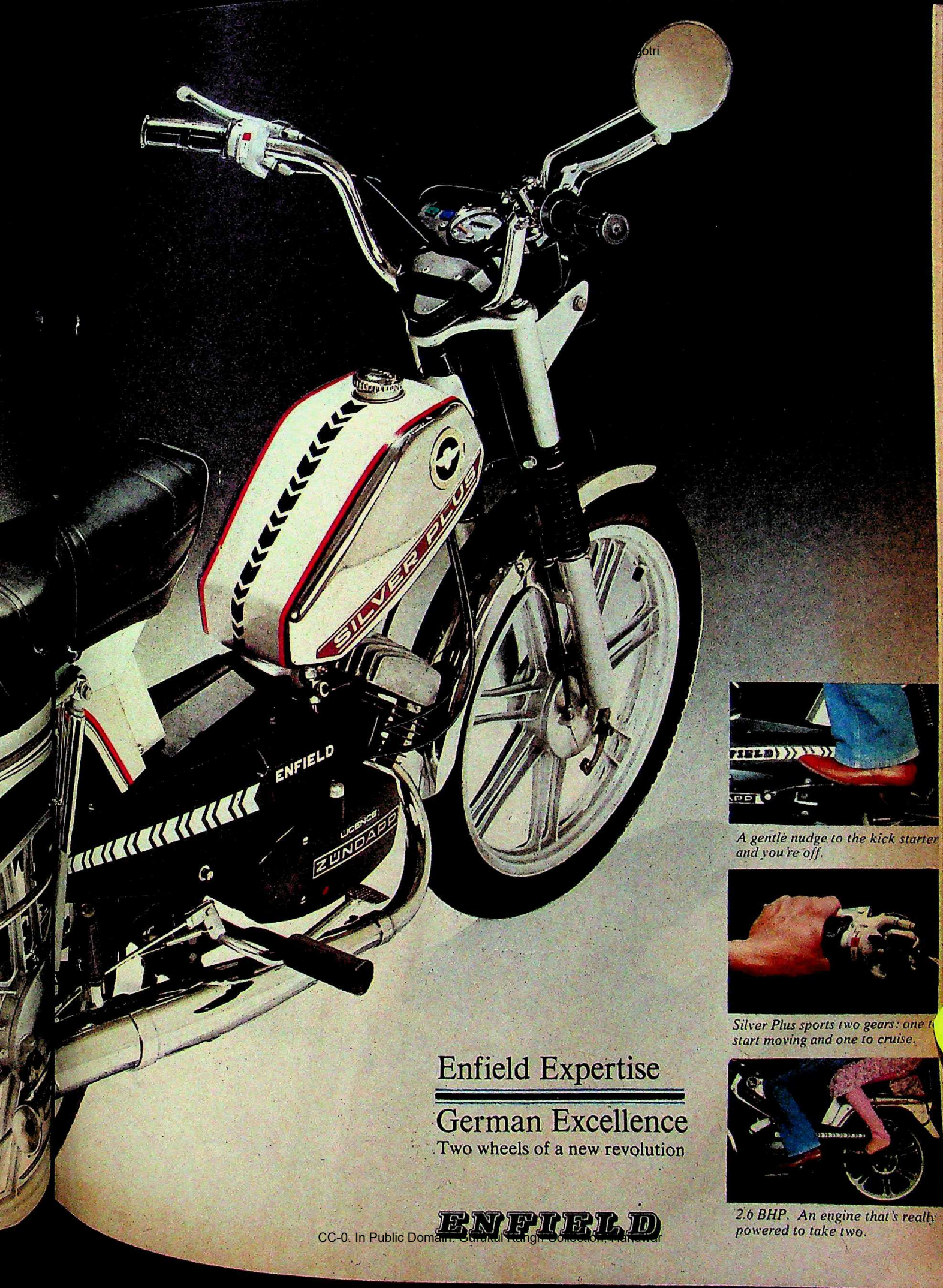
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BOMBAY

The Plot Thickens

LAND is always fodder for scandal, especially in a city like Bombay where all land is at a hefty premium. But even by Bombay's inflated yardstick the fiddle that is taking place is colossal. The racket centres on the Floor Space Index (FSI), the magic ratio that decides the built-up area for a given lot of land. Obviously, by quietly tacking on a figure to the area of a plot registered in the official records, the builder can construct much more on the same area. That is precisely the fraud that investigators are trying to unravel. At least 1,450 plot figures for Bombay and its suburbs are said to have been manipulated in this manner to construct crores worth of extra building space.

The extent of the fraud is enormous. The key cadastral survey register of the Surveyor and Land Records Department of the Bombay collector's office—a cadastral survey register lists the extent, the value and the ownership of a plot of land for purposes of taxation—gives the area of Survey No. 242 in the Tardeo Revenue Division as 18,544 sq yards. The plot actually measures only 13,544 sq yards, the fraudulent increase being of the order of 5,000 sq yards. The FSI for the area is 1.33 and the additional built-up area made available because of the illegal increase in the plot size works out to 74,700 sq ft. With real estate prices in the prime city area anywhere from Rs 800 to Rs 1,500 a sq ft, this means that Rs 7.5 crore worth of building have been added on—and all with the simple change of figure in the records.

The fraud ranges from something as low as 50 sq yards—Survey No. 133, Malabar Hill—to the incredible 7,948 sq yards discovered for Survey No. 1/306 in the Tardeo area. The owners of the plots range from individuals to the Bombay Municipal Corporation; even the President of India figures in the affair, because the India Government Mint listed as Survey No 399 acquired an increase of 16.17 sq yards in its plot, resulting in an increase in the built-up area of 241.58 sq ft.

Huge Investigation: Not surprisingly, this massive operation has set off something of a bureaucratic riot in Bombay's corridors of power. Although the Government has made out that only a few stray cases of manipulation are involved, a top secret circular from the Revenue Ministry to the collector's office, the Urban Land Ceiling (ULC) office and the Bombay Suburban District Office conveys exactly the opposite: the concerned officers have been asked to sift through all cases where building applications have been sought in the last five years. This is to help the police Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) which is unable to handle the huge investigation on its own.

Complicating matters is the fact that a number of authorities are involved. First, there is the Surveyor and Land Records Department of the Bombay collector's office, which maintains land records in the city of Bombay known as the island city, up to Mahim Creek. So far, 43 cases of prima facie manipulation have been referred from here to the ACB. Secondly, the Bombay Suburban District Office deals with land in the suburbs beyond Mahim Creek; this comes under an additional collector who in his turn reports to the director of records and settlement commissioner for Maharashtra based in Pune. This office has uncovered 1,405 cases where areas of plots have been tampered with. Finally, the ULC office, under a separate additional collector, often comes into the picture because whenever permission is required for building a certificate from here is necessary, saying that the owner's total vacant land does not exceed the land ceiling limit. This office also keeps a record of the plots.

The investigation has been going on for nearly a year now and the size of the task can be estimated from the fact that the Bombay collector's Survey Department alone takes care of some 31,900 properties whose records are being checked under the microscope. Even so, Bombay Collector Arun Bhatia felt it was time that prosecution began and asked his men to register at different police stations cases of land record forgery where the fudging in figures has indeed resulted in the actual construction of extra built-up area.

In a curious development, however, four concerned police

UP FOR GRABS

	Survey Number	Revenue division	Original area (sq. yards)	Increased area (sq. yards)	Difference between original & increase area (sq. yards)	Additional built-up area available due to illegal increase in area (sq. ft.)
1	*241	Tardeo	582	1,582	1,000	14,940
2	*242	"	13,544	18,544	5,000	74,700
3	1/306	"	642	8,590	7,948	118,743.12
4	381	"	140	176.60	36.60	546.80
5	382	"	136	183.93	47.93	716.07
6	414	"	3,094	4,148.89	1,059.89	15,760.06
7	399	"	3,837.08	3,853.25	16.17	241.58
8	2/250	"	1,354	1,450.74	96.74	1,445.30
9	*234	Byculla	2,329	2,829	500	7,470
10	*233	"	3,362	5,057.99	1,695.99	25,338.09
11	*224	"	1,957	2,957	1,000	14,940
12	*260	Malabar Hill	2,493	2,693	200	2,394
13	*267	"	1,192	1,354.04	162.04	1,939.62
14	*133	"	428	478	50	598.50
15	*351	"	4,188	4,688	500	5,985
16	*30/62	Dadar Nalgaum	526	675	149	2,226.06
17	*36/1	Princess Dock	133.22	383.78	250.56	2,999.20
18	*69	Mandvi	209.67	233.59	23.82	357.36

* Construction on additional built-up area completed

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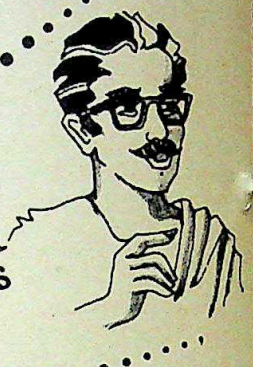
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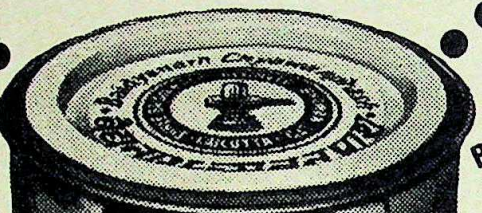
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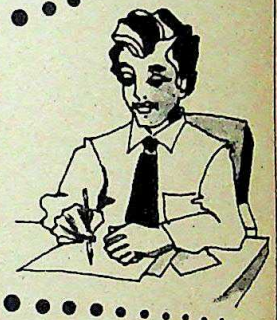


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stations—Gamdevi, Tardeo, Byculla and Pydhonie—where 12 complaints were to be lodged have so far not registered the FIR's. Police Commissioner Julio Ribeiro denies any special design or conspiracy in the matter. He goes on to add: "Since forgery is a time-consuming matter maybe somebody at the stations felt lethargic. I wish the collector could have informed me personally. I will investigate the matter."

Any other kind of action taken regarding a fraud that runs into crores of rupees does not amount to very much in relative terms. In the collector's office two senior surveyors were suspended last February by the then collector Manmohan Singh, after prima facie fiddles in Tardeo and Byculla came to light. P.D. Haval, superintendent of the survey office was also suspended. No action has been taken against any employee of the suburban office so far because the investigators are hampered by the fact that much relevant information has simply disappeared. Demarcation files, Cadastral Survey (cs) plans, applications for cs extracts, which would have revealed the names of surveyors and superintendents who had cleared the changed areas are untraceable.

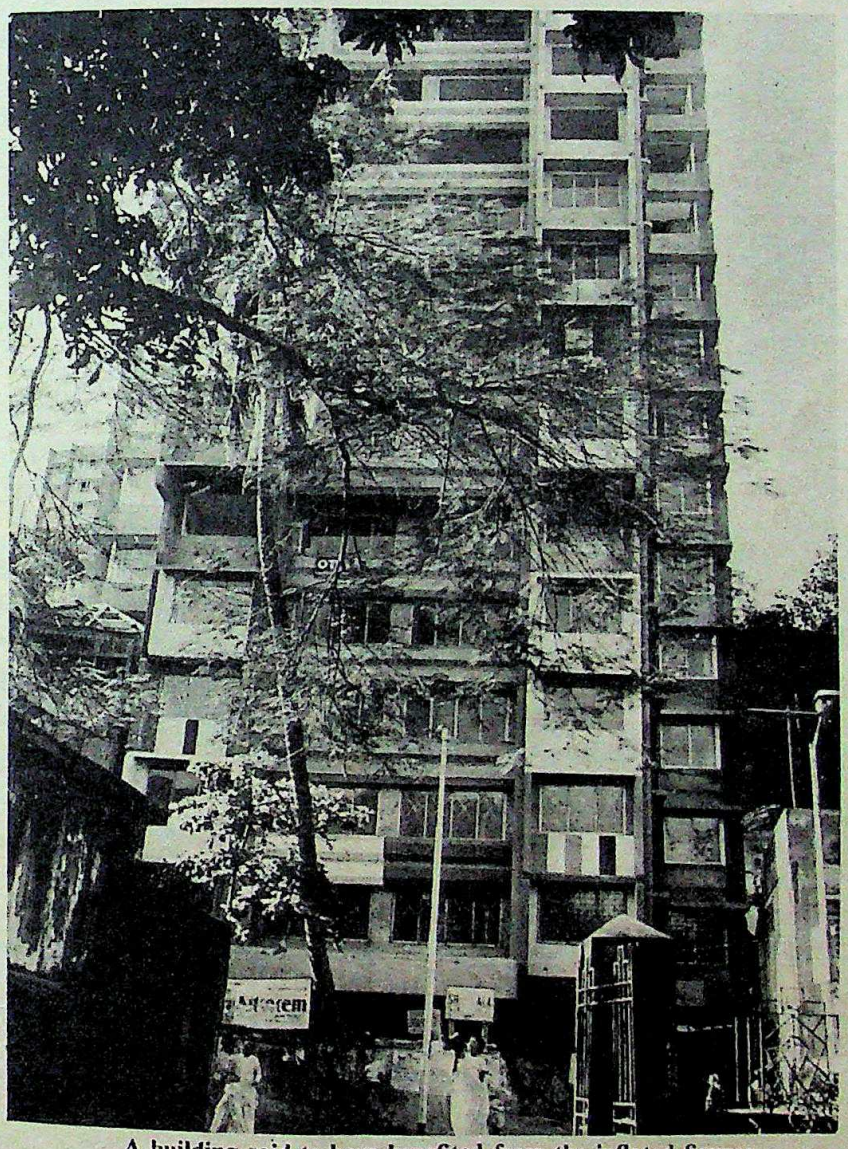
Out of the 43 cases in the Bombay collector's office, relevant documents are totally missing in at least 11 and partially in 15 others. In 10 cases, while the cs register indicates that plot figures have been tampered with, there is now evidence that cs extracts, necessary for obtaining permission to build from the Municipal Corporation, were applied for by the builder. But permission has definitely been granted in some cases—however, the extract duplicates which would have revealed the names of the surveyor and the superintendent are missing.

That is not all. Survey No. 224 in Byculla and Survey No. 267 in Malabar Hill, the demarcation register shows that though a copy of the demarcation plans was applied for, the actual files have disappeared. The register gives the names of the surveyors responsible for these two demarcations—which have resulted in additions of an excess built-up area of 14,940 sqft and 1,939.62 sqft respectively—as Desai and Kojwalker. Both are still working in the same department.

Transfer Tussle: What is more, the investigation is finding road blocks in its path. In August last year, Bhatia decided to transfer Senior Surveyor K.G. Raut and Superintending Surveyor H.N. Naik to the ULC in the interest of the investigation; two of the collector's surveyors are working there on deputation. The additional collector, however, refused to accept Raut and Naik and return the two surveyors saying that the ULC office was on a "time-bound programme until December 15", and could not afford to return the surveyors.

The transfers of Raut and Naik caused a veritable maelstrom, with the entire Revenue Department at the Secretariat demanding that the two surveyors be transferred back to the collector's office. Bhatia refused to succumb even when pressure began to mount, and finally K.G. Paranjpe, secretary, revenue and forest, personally passed an order on November 9, returning Raut and Naik to the collector's office. Interestingly, one of the original people who the ULC office said could not be relieved until December 15 had been on long leave since October 14 so his services could hardly have been so desperately required.

Curious Case: Another intriguing point is the extent of the involvement of some employees of the municipal corporation. A builder requires the permission of the corporation's Building Department and since the corporation has its own file stating the plot's original size, corporation officers must have been aware of sudden increases. Municipal Commissioner D.M. Sukthankar says that his men did notice discrepancies in some instances but adds that "we cannot sit in judgement on the collector's figures since in land records they are the final competent authority". He says, however, that he did issue a circular telling municipal staff not to take the collector's figures for granted; says he: "If there was any nexus between the corporation and the collector's office it is difficult to prove legally, since legally the reponsibility rests squarely with the land records department."

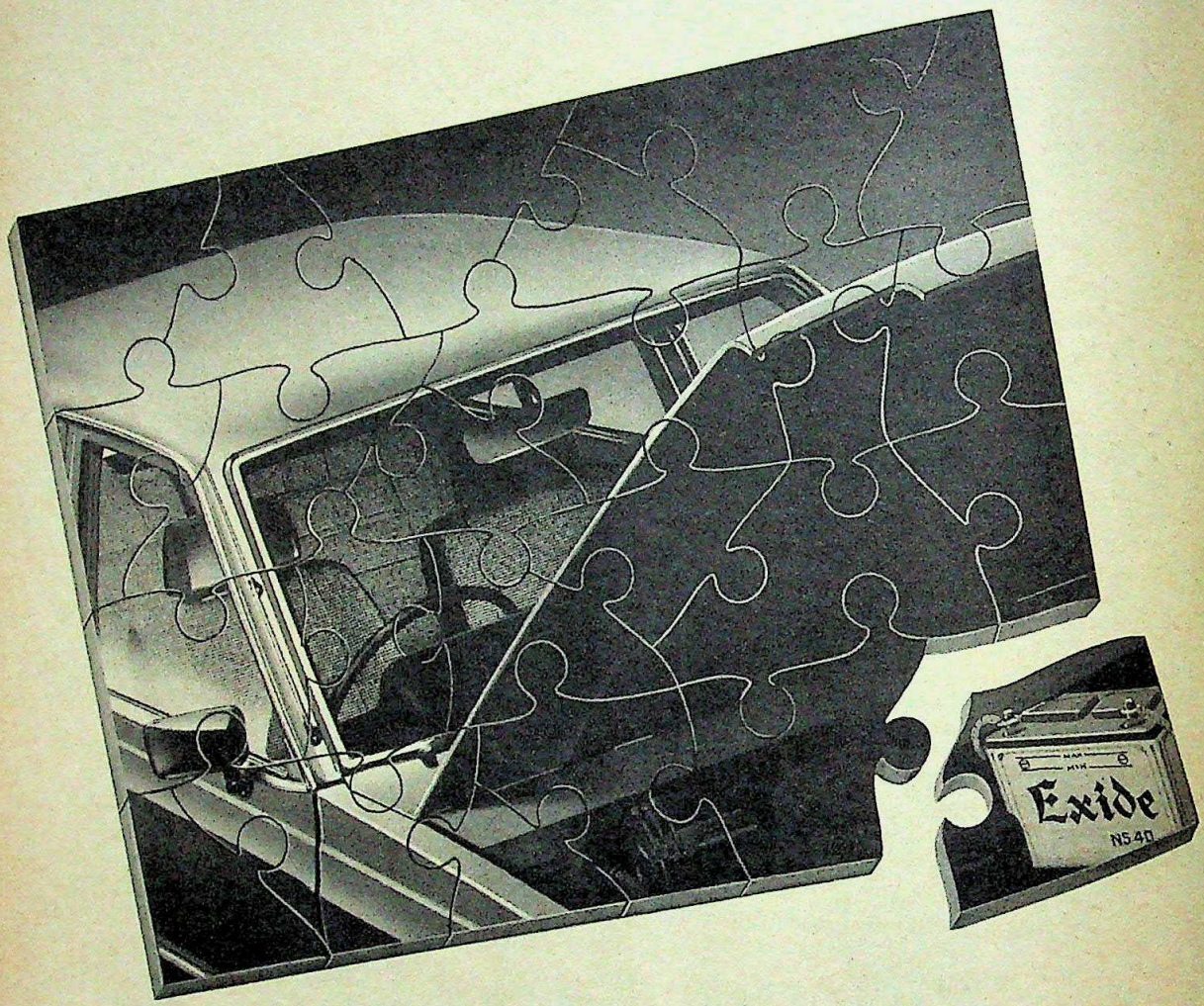


A building said to have benefited from the inflated figures

The investigators are, understandably, keeping quiet on the inquiries. Additional Commissioner of Police Gyanchand Verma of the ACB will only say: "We are investigating the cases but to reveal anything at this stage will hinder detection work." The ACB has more fiddles on its hands. It has been discovered that several of the older cs maps have been tampered with the additions made in red. The maps are periodically updated by the surveyors and one of their uses is to date the age of the building. Obviously, by irregularly getting an inclusion in an earlier map a house owner can benefit because legal right to land ensures after 12 years of occupancy on private land and 60 years on government land. The collector has now started another inquiry of the map fiddle. But it will be a long time before all the threads of the puzzle are sorted out. The plot thickens. —COOMI KAPOOR

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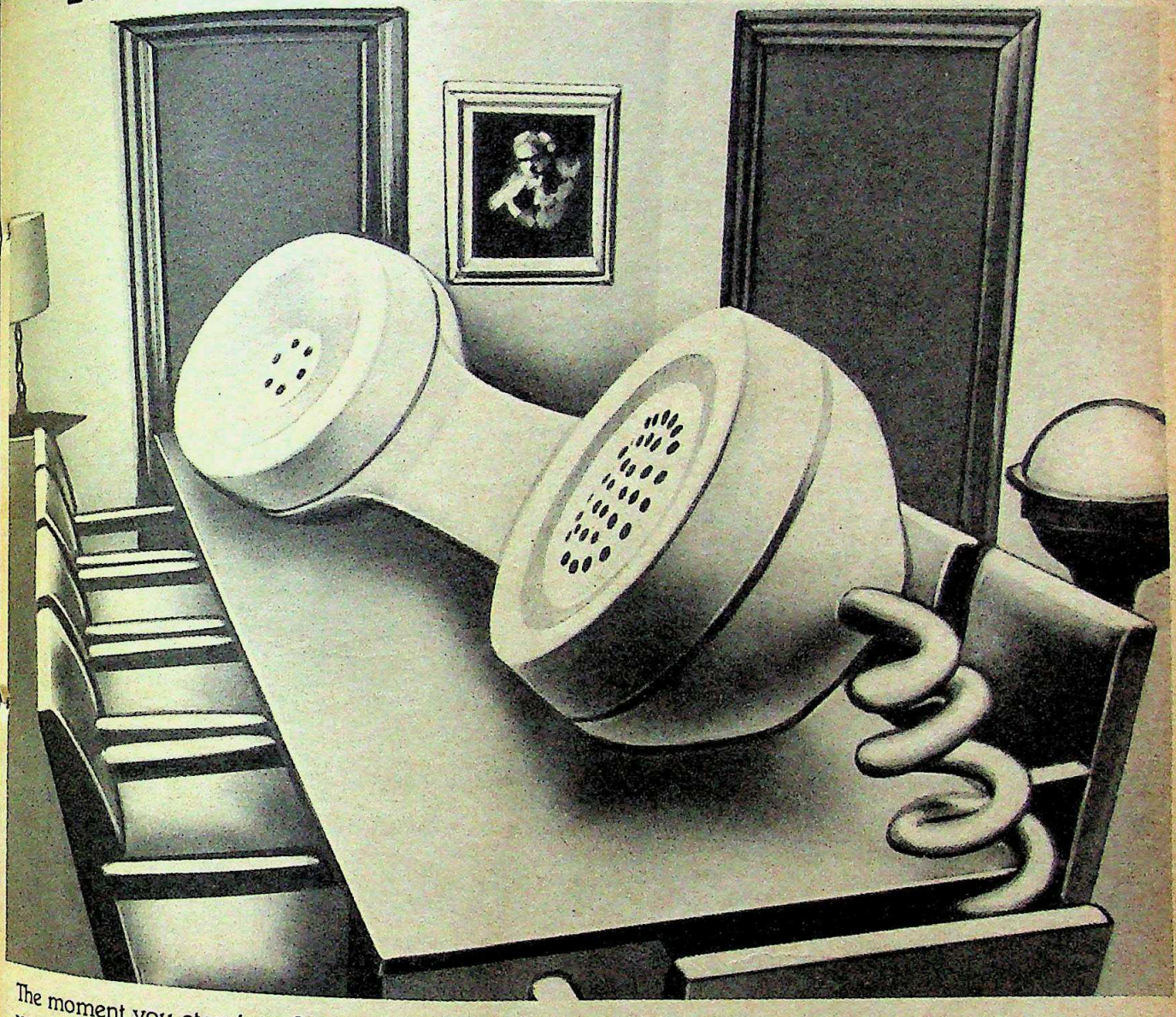
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DELHI

The Land Pirates

A POWERFUL local politician stands guard while an entire market is quickly built in Chandni Chowk, one of the most congested areas of the capital. Metropolitan Councillor Arjun Das, of Sanjay Gandhi fame, parades a delegation of street vendors before Prime Minister Indira Gandhi after the municipality takes a broom to them. A ruling party MP, K.C. Pandey, kicks up a fuss when his protégé's buildings are sought to be removed from the land on which they encroach; Union Works and Housing Minister Buta Singh asks for the file. And Delhi Mayor Mohinder Singh Saathi is alleged to have told municipal officials to ease off on demolitions in his and other areas.

Land grab is the name of the new game in Delhi and it is being played to the hilt by local politicians, greedy colonisers and petty bureaucrats who have together turned it into a roaring business swallowing what one estimate says is 250 acres of public land worth more than Rs 150 crore. That it should be happening at all is bad enough, but that it should occur under the noses of the high and mighty of the land is appalling. The nation's capital is the focus of national attention. It is the seat of all political power, the home of all agencies which should be preventing such things. It is the nation's show case where an Asiad-related clean-up is matched by an unprecedented building boom which has sent real estate prices soaring and created the milieu for the unscrupulous to operate.

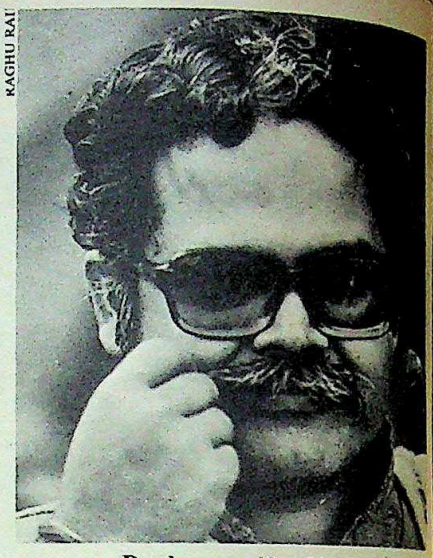
Small wonder then that over 150 unauthorised markets have mushroomed all over the city, their enterprising builders selling off the shops at prices that range, for a 10 ft by 15 ft cubbyhole, from Rs 1 lakh in the trans-Yamuna areas, to Rs 5 lakh in prime commercial districts such as Sadar Bazar and Karol Bagh. The entrepreneurs have netted an estimated Rs 100 crore in the process.

And woe to anyone who treads on their toes: the ubiquitous politicians are quick to their defence. Last fortnight, for instance, when Deputy Commissioner Virendra Singh led a Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) team trying to demolish over 1,000 unauthorised shops in the traditional marketplaces of Chandni Chowk, Sadar Bazar, Kashmere Gate and Paharganj, he and his minions were driven back by threats from politicians—some were physically assaulted. In another case, a corporation employee was manhandled when he deposed against Congress(I) Municipal Councillor Ganga Sahai Bairwa for encroaching upon the corporation store. Not surprisingly quite a few civic officials have sought transfers out of the sensitive Building Department.

Sensitive Cases: Last month, however, there were clear signs that the battle-weary officials of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and the MCD had had enough. They sent a list of over 25 cases of unauthorised construction and encroachment on public land to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for detailed probes with the terse explanation that the civic bodies found the politicians too hot to handle. In a separate letter Delhi Lt-Governor Jagmohan urged Union Home Minister P.C. Sethi to order CBI inquiries into another set of land grab cases. Fumed Jagmohan: "These illegal builders are ruining the city. Any firm action against them, though welcomed by the law-abiding citizen and the general public, is termed as excess through propaganda machinery that is assiduously set in motion. Pressure groups come into play, crowds are gathered and human considerations are summoned and ultimately action is frustrated."

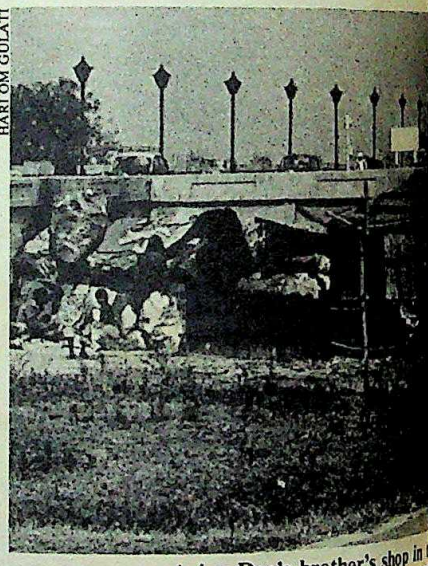
Land grab is the name of the new game in Delhi. Local politicians, greedy colonisers and compliant petty bureaucrats have turned it into a roaring business, swallowing with breathtaking impunity over 250 acres of public land worth more than Rs 150 crore.

Action is imperative however; the encroachments are all over the place. For example, Arjun Das's brother is running a restaurant on municipal land in the INA market, a major shopping complex which comes under the purview of the New Delhi Municipal Committee (NDMC). Another Congress(I) metropolitan councillor has taken over land in the south Delhi colony of Green Park for his and a property dealer's office. Significantly, cases of encroachment on private or irrigated farmland are conspicuous by their absence. Says DDA Vice-



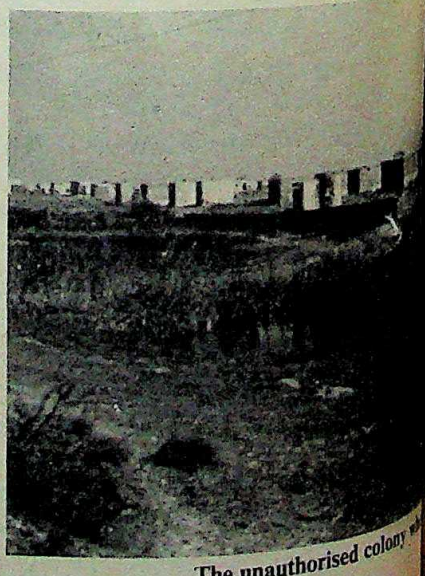
RAGHU RAI

Pandey: considerable clout



HARI OM GULATI

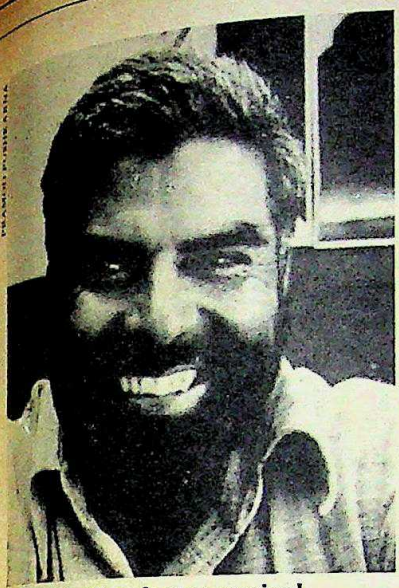
Arjun Das's brother's shop in t



The unauthorised colony

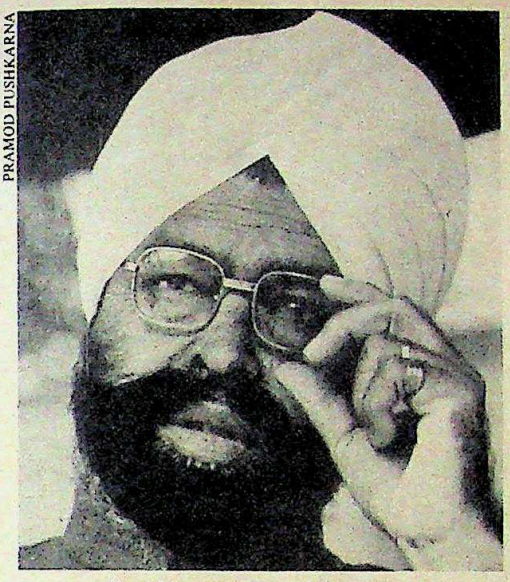
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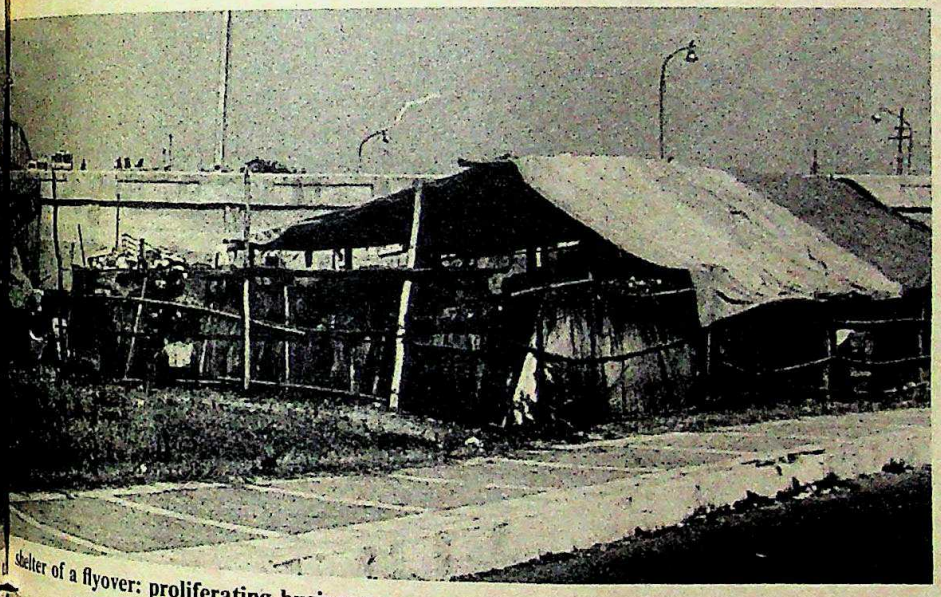
PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Arjun Das: favours received



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Saathi: controversial actions



Shelter of a flyover: proliferating business



Congress(I) MP Pandey's protégés have many plots: encroaching with impunity

Chairman Harish Khanna: "There has been a spurt in encroachment on public land. The concept is that only public land can be squatted upon and ultimately settled."

Not all politicians, thankfully, are involved in the massive land grab. Dr Narender Nath, a Congress(I) member of the Metropolitan Council from Shahdara, and Abjeet Singh Gulati, a Congress(I) municipal councillor, felt concerned enough to jointly write a confidential note to the Lt-Governor and Mrs Gandhi saying: "Some mafia leaders in connivance with the officials and political personalities are grabbing the public land. It is bringing bad name to the party. We must take immediate steps to stop it."

Secret Report: This cry of protest was followed by another confidential report to the Home Ministry and the Lt Governor by the MCD's Building Department. In his letter last December the superintending engineer (building) said: "It is worth mentioning that various important elected members have approached this office not to take any action against the unauthorised constructions.... Members claim that demolition of unauthorised construction is a national wastage and once it has been completed, it should not be demolished and in case the demolitions are resorted, this will adversely affect the interest of their voters."

The engineer's report detailed sins of omission and commission that covered everything from shops to historic monuments. It lists, for instance, 20 illegally constructed shops in Uttam Nagar and Pant Nagar. It goes on to talk of interference by big wheels such as Deputy Mayor J.P. Aggarwal and Shanti Desai, BJP leader in the Municipal Corporation, who are alleged to have intervened to stop demolition of unauthorised commercial complexes in Old and New Delhi. It points to the construction of an illegal 100-shop market in Bhagirath Palace, north India's largest electrical goods centre: the job was completed in three months starting October 1980, each shop going at a premium of Rs 5 lakh. When opposition leaders protested recently, the matter was referred to the Anti-corruption Department of the MCD.

The report also talks of a 150-shop market in Hauz Qazi—Delhi's largest steel and sanitary goods market—built with the help of Congress(I) leaders. A dilapidated residential complex was pulled down to accommodate this and construction completed at breakneck pace in three months starting September 1981.

Another lucrative reason for land grab are hotels and guest-houses. The report details a Rs 1 crore, 49-room hotel on a 1,000 sq m residential plot in Green Park, allegedly permitted at the prompting of a powerful

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Congress(I) MP from Uttar Pradesh. The building was constructed in violation of the approved building plans and the Urban Land Ceiling Act. The report lists another irregularly built guest-house in Paharganj as well as unauthorised additions to guest-houses in Old and New Delhi.

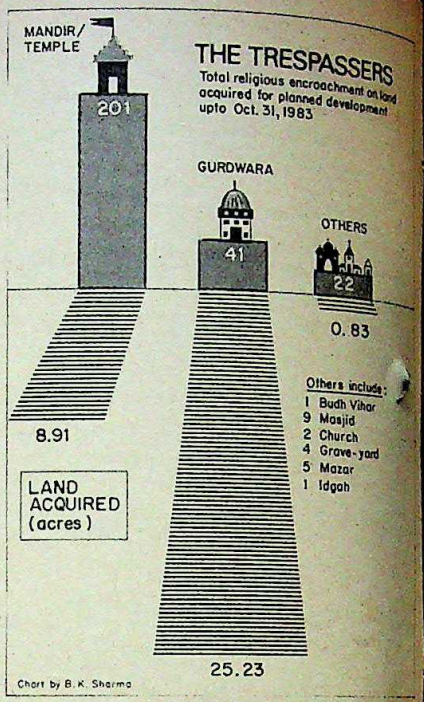
Powerful Politicians: The report has no hesitation in naming people who, it alleges, are living off the fat of the land. Two sons of Hargian Singh, a Congress(I) member of the Metropolitan Council and former president of the East Delhi District Congress Committee(I), are said to be carving out plots for group housing societies out of DDA land. The brother of Surat Singh, chairman of the policy making body of the MCD, was allegedly collecting monthly rent from encroachers on public land in his constituency. Amod Kumar, deputy chairman of the Civil Lines Zonal Committee, allegedly broke down the famous Bela Road wall to facilitate access to his building, rented to a transport company; the ancient wall on the Ring Road is a protected monument.

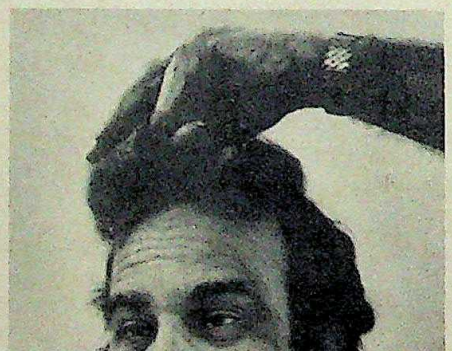
The NDMC also appears to have obliged Metropolitan Councillor Arjun Das by giving him 765 sq ft of prime land in Laxmibai Nagar Market in August 1981 at the monthly rent of Rs 35; the market rent is Rs 1,500. Arjun Das appears to have got the land—which forms the lane behind two shops he was allotted during the Emergency—without even putting in an application for it. NDMC officials justified the allotment by saying that the area would be used for the facility of the visiting public, and not for professional or commercial purposes. Incidentally, Das is allegedly using the NDMC assistant engineer's office as his political headquarters; the NDMC enquiry office compound is used to park his vehicles. The NDMC has also ignored encroachment on the public passage in front of his shop in Laxmibai Nagar Market; other shopkeepers are not allowed to cover this area.

Widespread Interference: In fact, the report names 80 of the 106 municipal councillors—including the deputy mayor and four zonal committee chairmen—as allegedly encouraging encroachments and illegal constructions throughout Delhi. Mayor Saathi comes off very badly. He has, it is alleged, brought pressure on MCD officials not to demolish buildings—among them shops, additions to guest-houses, and other constructions such as a multi-storeyed building in Mansarover Garden in west Delhi—and is also alleged to have legitimised other illegal constructions: he recently inaugurated a temporary cinema hall in west Delhi which had had some illegal additions made to it. As the engineer says in the report: "The honourable mayor who is also an elected member from Ward 40 has told me number of times that the persons who have elected him from his constituency believe that the mayor will be protecting their interests and as such this ward should be spared from demolition operations."

In that context, it is not surprising that politicians clash with administrators trying to impliment the law. Some officials have been humiliated, such as Municipal Commissioner P.P. Shrivastav who ordered some demolitions and found that Congress(I) leaders were demanding of Home Minister Sethi that he be immediately transferred. Last December Congress(I) members even alleged that senior municipal officials were making money on the unauthorised construction. No wonder, then, that S.S. Man, additional deputy commissioner, Civil Lines Zone, wrote to the municipal commissioner describing the threats he was receiving from Congress(I) leaders; wrote Man: "You will agree with me that in such a situation it has become very difficult to discharge our duties. Also, our lives are not safe in such an atmosphere which is being created by Amod Kumar, deputy chairman, special zonal committee."

Predictably, the politicians refute all the allegations. Says Saathi: "Let there be an independent probe. Why should I encourage unauthorised constructions and encroachments? It is my duty to look into the complaints of harassments and victimisation. Since we are launching a campaign against corruption, some officials have started propaganda against me and other leaders."





"Self-styled leaders of religious communities or groups occupy land with impunity. The interest of a religious community and even legally correct and normally perfect action is described as hurting the sentiments of the people."

—Lt-Governor Jagmohan

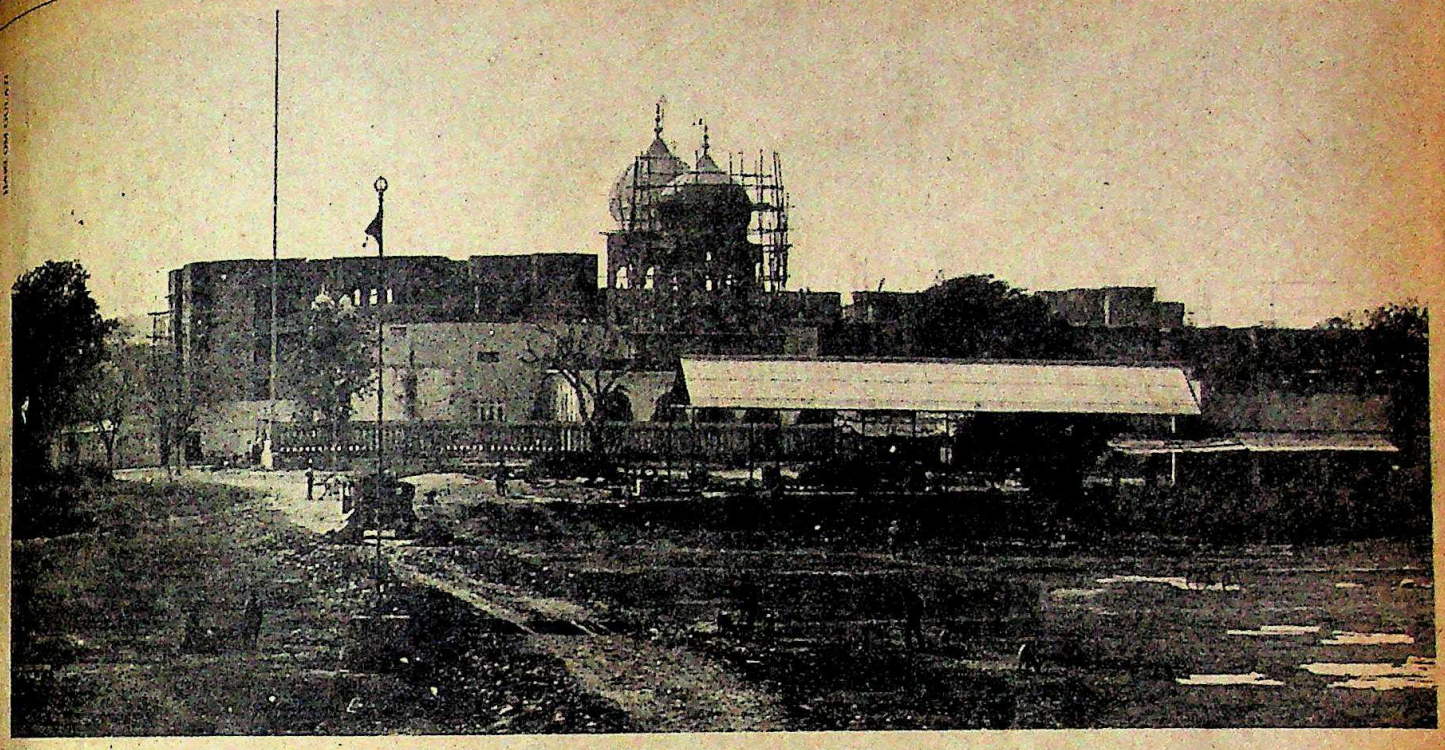
THE KNOTTIEST problem that the civic authorities face is encroachment on land by religious organisations which, according to DDA estimates, have grabbed over 35 acres of land worth over Rs 25 crore since 1980. As a senior DDA official puts it: "We can handle all the illegal encroachments by private individuals but touching a religious place means playing with fire."

For instance, a group of militant Sikhs took over 8 acres near New Friends Colony earmarked for the DDA's self-financing scheme flats. They promised that, except for the land meant for the gurudwara, they would return the rest—but this has not been done so far. Thus the DDA has lost land worth over Rs 5 crore and has had to shift its flats to another site causing a 30 per cent hike in the construction cost, which works out to a total loss of Rs 8 crore.

The holy encroachments can cause exasperating road blocks. During the Asiad the design of the flyover in front of the Oberoi Intercontinental Hotel had to be changed because a graveyard—on public land—came in the way. Result: costs rose by over Rs 2 crore. Similarly in west Delhi a temple came up overnight and, despite assurances to the contrary, it stayed there. the DDA suffered a loss of over Rs 50 lakh. According to DDA and municipal estimates over 20 park, commercial and sewage

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A gurudwara being built on public land in south Delhi: religious tensions

projects are held up because of encroachment by religious set-ups.

Their modus operandi is quite simple. Most of them are not even registered as religious societies. A few people get together, choose a plot, plant an idol or any other symbol of worship there and build a temporary structure around it. Later they collect money from the faithful as well as prospective shopkeepers. Says DDA Vice-Chairman Khanna: "Religious encroachments become the nucleus of other unauthorised activities."

They become the focus of politics as well, making the authorities even more wary of stepping on their toes. Instead, free water and electricity supply is made available. Admitted Jagmohan: "Self-styled leaders of religious communities or groups occupy public land with impunity. The interest of a religious community and even legally correct and morally perfect action is described as hurting the sentiments of the people."

What is more, the illegal constructions can provoke communal tension. Last year, for instance, the Delhi Administration had to impose curfew in east Delhi when a few Sikhs installed the Nishan Saheb—the tall flagpole outside gurudwaras—in the middle of a ground meant for a school. Another community reacted immediately by installing an idol nearby. Only Jagmohan's last-minute intervention prevented the situation from deteriorating. Similarly in west Delhi two communities almost came to blows when an attempt was made to convert a public park into a graveyard. Works and Housing Minister Buta Singh succeeded in finding a solution.

Labour Trouble: Another headache for the authorities are the jhuggi dwellers, usually migrant labour who have been sold pieces of land at Rs 200 to Rs 500 a plot by the politicians. Not only do the politicians make money, they are also assured of votes and crowds during demonstrations. The DDA estimates that over 2 lakh new jhuggis have sprouted all over Delhi in the last two years —in addition to over 3 lakh jhuggis shifted to seven resettlement colonies during and after the Emergency.

The jhuggiwallas have a nice racket going. Each is assured of a 25 sq m plot on the city outskirts and, on the urging of their political protectors, they sell these off at a premium to others. Thus, municipal estimates have it that over 70 per cent of the people who were shifted from the city to the resettlement areas have built new jhuggis on their earlier plots. For example, the old Subzimandi was cleared during the Emergency but a large chunk has been reoccupied by the jhuggis.

The land grab is aggravated by the Central Government's decisions to regularise encroachment on the eve of elections, encouraging the politicians to greater efforts. Until 1982, the Government had regularised 612 colonies on 11,000 acres of public land worth over Rs 500 crore—without charging the inhabitants a single paisa. The colonies are without proper drainage and sewage facilities and have become virtual slums.

The tendency of the courts to rule against demolitions has also contributed to the already existing chaos. For example, a Delhi court granted 1,800 demolition stay orders in a year—about five a day. Complains Jagmohan: "It is paradoxical to have justice object to such steps. The vested interests are able to exploit the system and this is causing incalculable harm to the city, the people and the rule of law itself."

It was to plug such loopholes that both the DDA and the Delhi Administration wrote to the Central Government in 1981 to make unauthorised construction a cognisable offence. The MCD also asked that the demolition notice period be lowered from three days to 24 hours. Unfortunately, it was told to increase the period to nine days—making it easier for the builders to secure stay orders.

In its turn, the DDA asked the Central Government to review the land acquisition process—at present it takes over 15 years to acquire a piece of land, and vacant land is too big a temptation for the encroachers. Disclosed Khanna: "The land for which a notification was issued in 1959 is being handed to me in 1984. We must reduce this period." Despite repeated reminders from the DDA, however, the Central Government has not moved an inch in pushing through legislation to curb the menace.

With the general election coming closer and closer, it is unlikely to do so. It appears that Delhi citizens will have to live with the unpalatable fact of open spaces of their once-beautiful city being eaten up by insatiable mercenaries out to make a fast buck.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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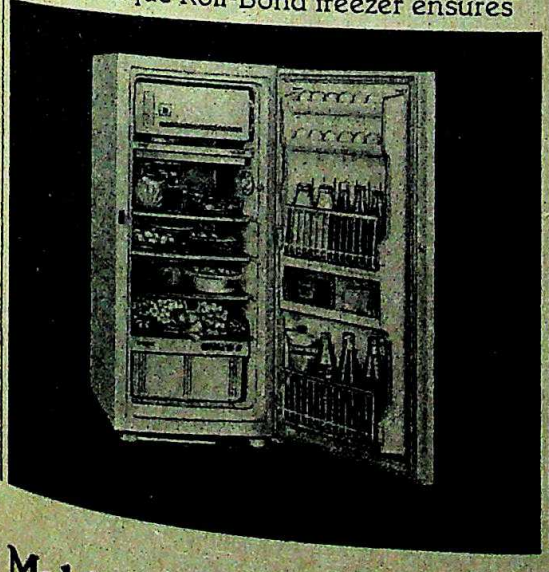
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Why are more and more people who are buying refrigerators these days putting their money on the new Allwyn 2000 SL? It certainly isn't from a lack of choice. On the contrary. In the confusion of promises and more promises, Allwyn's 7-year guarantee is the simple yet indisputable assurance of quality people are looking for. After all, what they really want to be sure about is will their refrigerator cool better? Will it last longer? Will it work trouble-free? And the fact that the Allwyn is guaranteed for 2 years longer than any other refrigerator says clearly that it will. To all three. You can count on it.

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BENAZIR BHUTTO

"The Persecution Continues"

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAMESH CHANDRAN



UNBENDING and unshaken despite years of strength-sapping detention, Benazir Bhutto bristles with confidence. The daughter of Pakistan's late President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is all set to begin a fresh assault on Pakistan's military regime. Tall, stately and with winsome good looks, the 30-year-old is seen by her admirers in the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) *as a potential prime minister.*

Her sudden release from detention in Pakistan last month came as a surprise for the international media. As doctors in Pakistan offered conflicting opinions on the ear infection she has been plagued with since 1978, she was left with little option but to go abroad for treatment.

Last fortnight, INDIA TODAY *Paris Correspondent* RAMESH CHANDRAN *met Benazir for a 75-minute interview—her first ever to the Indian press—at the elegantly furnished apartment of her aunt Behjat Hariri in a fashionable London area. Also present was her press spokesman Bashir Riaz, the editor of the London-based Musawaat, who taped the interview. Benazir disarmingly remarked later: "Look, don't think I'm worried that you'd misquote me. But we need to keep track of all the statements I make and also to distribute them among our* PPP *network."*

*Benazir spoke freely on a range of subjects concerned with her beloved Pakistan —the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (*MRD*), her own ordeal as a captive of the military regime, the book she was supposed to have written, but which turned out to be a forgery, and the Islamisation of Pakistan. Excerpts:*

Q. *How does it feel being free after having been under detention for so long, being back with your family?*

A. Well, I am happy that I am free. In fact I have forgotten what it feels like being free. At the same time I am really sad that I couldn't be free in my own country. I am free here so far away and also at a time when so many of our important leaders—practically the entire steering committee, so many members of the executive committee and provincial presidents are all behind bars. So many of our workers—the poor and the shirtless who courted arrest are all still imprisoned because they have dreams of a better society. Their sacrifice is indeed moving because for them their livelihood depends on their being free. And not only their survival but the survival of their children, the survival of their

Benazir Bhutto: "I am really sad I couldn't be free in my own country"

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old parents, survival of their extended families. So my feelings are mixed really. Of course if I can help mitigate their sufferings in some way from here—that's what I intend to do. I do hope to contribute to the just struggle of our people.

Q. *When you have finished with your medical treatment, do you intend going back?*

A. I intend having consultations with our political leaders on what the most effective course of action would be. And as per their advice and taking into account the various political factors, that is where I will have to be. But I have always felt that my continued incarceration was also a matter of psychological encouragement to all our party workers heroically facing the odds against martial law. So therefore it was with great reluctance that I finally took this decision to come abroad and particularly at a time when the MRD movement had begun. While I was detained in Pakistan my situation was not the same as other political prisoners. Of course they have faced hardships and let us not detract from their prolonged detention. But my case was different. The PPP is the largest national party. I was held so tightly that contacts with other party leaders was impossible and in many ways it seemed as though they sought to paralyse the leadership or the communication levels between a party leader and the party. After all a party is like a human—there is the head and there is the body. If the brain is paralysed, the whole party structure becomes paralysed. My decision to leave Pakistan was due to medical reasons. If I were not ill and I did not need this treatment I would not have chosen to go out.

Q. *And if you do go back, you do realise it may be back to prison?*

A. Oh, if I go back, let us make no mistake, I will not go back to freedom, however much I may desire it. I would like to go back because that is where our struggle is—it is not in the green pastures of England.

Q. *How did you handle your years in solitary confinement and detention? You had little contact with your colleagues. But did you have access to papers, books, radio?*

A. I don't like talking about my solitary confinement or incarceration because it is a painful period and it does reopen old wounds to talk about it again and from which I'm trying to recover. But more importantly I wonder if it is right for me sitting in London, breathing free air, and talking about my anguish when so many others are languishing behind bars. Surely the attention should be on them, their suffering and their contribution. Their wives are running from pillar to post, seeking appointments...

Q. *Your colleague Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi recently requested the military authorities to "forgive and forget" and open a "new chapter of love among brothers". Don't you find this a bit curious considering Jatoi had called for a* Jihad *three months ago at his home town Moro?*

A. Quite right. Therefore the statement should be looked at within the context of past statements and utterances. When I was under detention, all sorts of things would be said in the press and I'd send letters to the Home Department denying these press reports. I used to feel awfully frustrated. So I think the main thing is not to jump to conclusions on statements attributed to leaders who are under detention. They are not in a position to clarify or contradict.

"I wonder if it is right for me sitting in London, breathing free air, and talking about my anguish when so many others are languishing behind bars. Surely the attention should be on them, their suffering and their contribution."

Q. *Let's talk about this book,* Pakistan: The Gathering Storm *published in India under your name. Your lawyer had already denied your involvement in a statement. Did you have anything at all to do with this book?*

A. Let me tell you I first heard of the book when I saw an article in *Jang* newspaper headlined: Benazir Discloses Details on Pakistan's Active Nuclear Policy. I said: now, wait a minute. What is this? I do not have access to state secrets and therefore I am in no position to reveal any kind of secret details. I issued a denial saying I had nothing to do with the book. I was unsure if it was written by friend or foe. But if it were written by a foe, obviously they were not going to take me into confidence. If it was written by a friend, the writer would have tried to get in touch with me. If it were written by an opportunist, again I would have been contacted. This book was not mine and I immediately wrote to the Home Department saying that I had not written the book, having seen the *Jang* story and if they knew of some quarter who wanted to gain by sending me before a military tribunal for violation of official secrecy. Luckily, because of an income tax matter, one of my lawyers got some details of the book...

Q. *This was Salim Zulfikar Khan?*

A. That's right. I asked him: Salim, what's this? He suggested doing some initial investigation. But I told him not to delay because whether it is a good book or a bad book, it was something which I had not written. And he issued a denial. But what angered me more than the publication of this false book was the allegation that I had come under pressure from the military regime and denied it. If I didn't come under pressure when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was in his death cell, when I was sweltering away in the Sukkur heat and I couldn't have even a glass of water, when I didn't come under pressure all these years when I was in Karachi, why should I come under pressure when I'm sitting in my own house?

Q. *What the managing director of the publishing house said was that your statement could have been made under duress.*

A. Yes. This was very unfair. And he took advantage of the fact that I was not in a position to reply. I was very upset over that statement. To an extent I can understand they were fooled by the book. You have examples of Howard Hughes's book, the Hitler diaries. All right, the publisher can say, 'I was fooled'. But to make a statement like that about a person whose character you should know, whose life since 1977 is like an 'open book'. To attribute to them that you had come under pressure is to slander them.

Q. *The book had references to a common programme which appeared to go against the grain of your political philosophy. It included subverting the Friday prayers, assaulting magistrates who arrested demonstrators, and even, curiously, spreading jokes about the General.*

A. Anyone who knows me would have realised I had nothing to do with it. Somebody who is a follower of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto—whether it is his daughter or not—to say these things is so disrespectful. Someone has obviously been watching too many Indian movies with their General Yahoo going on.

Q. *Salim Zulfikar Khan had threatened legal action against the publishers. What is the latest on this?*

A. I told him if this forgery were published in England I would take legal action here. We have relatives, friends, we have access here. But we don't have that position in India.

Q. *Is a retraction or apology from the publisher in order now?*

A. Actually I haven't thought of it because since my arrival here the first priority is my health. But writing books like these are wrong. Some years back, there was another book, again published in India, *Death Cell Diaries* which were attributed to Shaheed. And he had not written it. Now this is the second time.

Q. *You mention* Death Cell Diaries. *Your father's trial was widely condemned as a*

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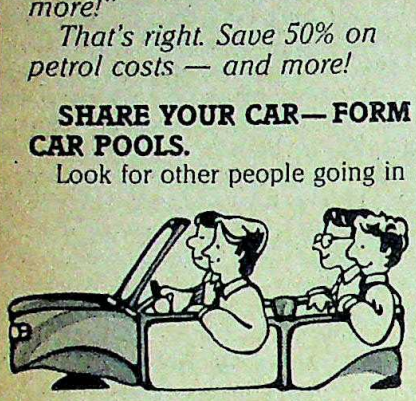
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SHARE YOUR CAR—FORM CAR POOLS.

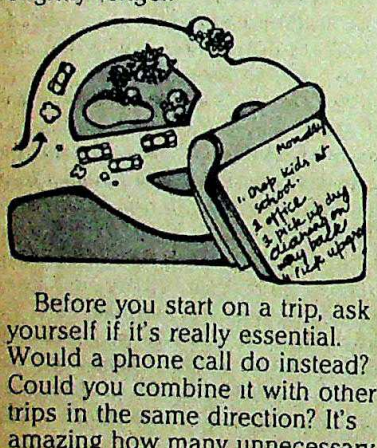
Look for other people going in



the same direction. Share your car — and the costs too!

PLAN YOUR ROUTE, PLAN YOUR TRIPS.

Avoid rush-hour or stop-and-go traffic, which is a big fuel waster. You'll get more mileage from each litre if you take a less congested route, even though it's slightly longer.



Before you start on a trip, ask yourself if it's really essential. Would a phone call do instead? Could you combine it with other trips in the same direction? It's amazing how many unnecessary trips can be avoided in this way.

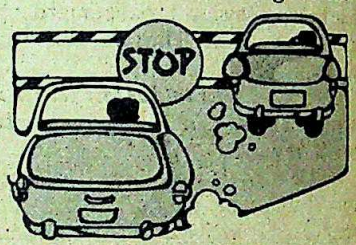
REDUCE LOADS.

Unnecessary loads increase fuel consumption. See if you really need all those odd things in the dicky, or if you need to carry the luggage rack all the time.



SWITCH OFF AND SAVE.

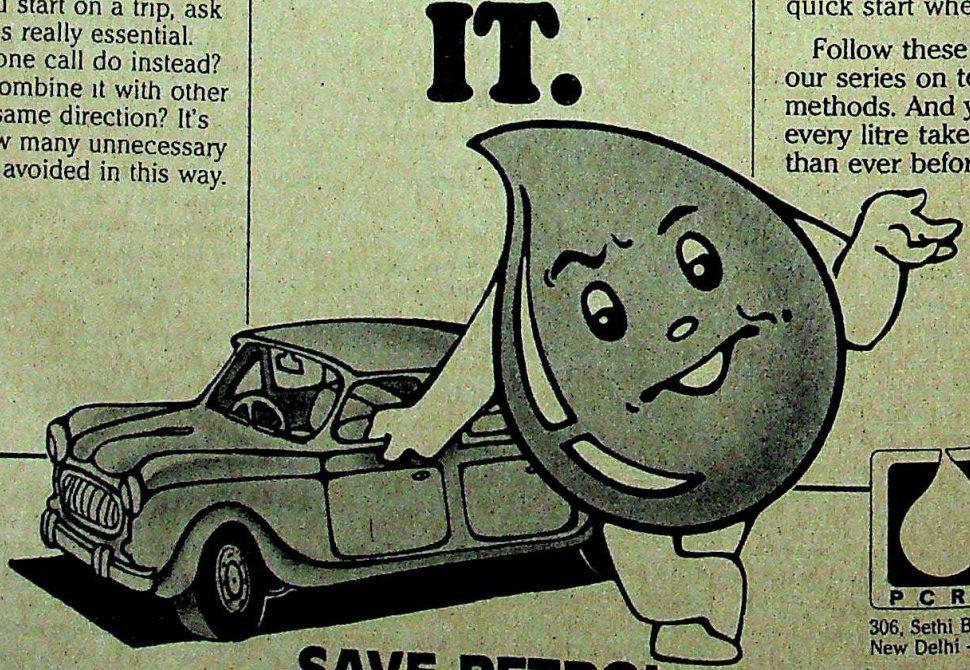
If you're stuck at a railway crossing or in a traffic jam that's going nowhere fast, switch off! There's no point in using petrol to stand still. And that goes for



long idling whilst waiting for someone. If it's going to be more than a minute, switch off and save.

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travesty of justice. Do you think that had a concerted international campaign been mounted, his life could possibly have been saved?

A. When somebody's determined to kill someone else, he'll do it irrespective of what happens. Obviously in retrospect we could go through many contortions as to what could have been done. But Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto always said they want to kill me and they will not leave me. He said they would not have arrested me in this humiliating and degrading manner, they would not have burst into our bedrooms with the commandos armed with Sten guns and thrown our belongings about, if they had not taken the decision to assassinate me. They would not have kept me shackled in the death cell with bleeding sores if they had not taken the decision. This constant humiliation—they wanted to break him before they killed him. They would not let him live before he died. It wasn't trial of murder but it was murder of a trial. The farce that went on there!

Q. *Your mother told us last year in Paris that on his last day, he was extremely brave. How did he react to you?*

A. He was always brave and courageous. You cannot imagine how an ordinary person could have lived in those conditions leave alone a prime minister. Their taunts could not affect him. Their humiliations could not affect him. I would always tell him A said they had said this, B said the judges had discussed this, and C said what the General had said. He would then say, you don't understand. They are going to kill me. Try and learn as much as you can from me now. And from that death cell he was the one who organised everything and we just carried out his orders.

On April 2, 1979, we were informed of the decision. It was my mother's day for the interview. Anyway I don't want to talk about the kind of detail at this stage for we don't know, tomorrow we may be going back and we don't want to reveal too much. We knew this was our last meeting. We called the jail superintendent and he was pretty shamefaced about it because friend or foe they couldn't help but be affected by his heroism. It was like an electricity charge giving strength to people far and wide, to all workers, to the leaders, to the party, to everyone he was the source of the energy. When the superintendent said, 'Yes, sir, it has been fixed for the following morning', Shaheed said he was entitled to meet 50 people and he would like to see some relatives. Of course, nobody was permitted after us. He then said, 'What a relief, now I can go back to my people, to my land'. He gave us back all his belongings and kept just a cigar . . .

Q. *Since then your family has had numerous court cases filed by the state, and some property confiscated. Do you see a vindictive pattern against the Bhutto family?*

A. Yes, the persecution continues. Shaheed Zulfikar Bhutto was persecuted because he was the undisputed leader of the oppressed masses of Pakistan, who believed in equity and fair distribution. And since we continue to fight, we are also targets. It is a battle of concepts—the concept of military



"How can you talk of the supremacy of Islam when you overturned the Islamic Constitution and imposed upon it a military court, a military regulation which have nothing to do with Islam?"

sovereignty versus the concept of civilian order.

Q. *You and your mother believe in democratic methods and order. Your brothers who founded the Al Zulfikar organisation follow a different strategy. Do you have any contacts with them? Are you looking forward to meeting them?*

A. My brothers left at a young and impressionable age—at least Shahnawaz was extremely young. Murtaza too was a young man—but he had been educated at Harvard and he was also a student at Oxford and therefore why he formed Al Zulfikar he is in a better position to say. Why he believes the concept of armed struggle would be better to ask him. But I would like to meet him to discuss these points. But I would like to first of all see my little nieces who are my father's first grandchildren.

Q. *Some reports had indicated that they married the daughters of an Afghan diplomat.*

A. I don't know what the girls' father does. But they did marry Afghan sisters. I would also like to find out what they sought to gain by their strategy. We were not consulted in this matter. For a long time when they were based in London, we kept in touch with them. But after 1979 when they moved, we didn't know what had happened to them. We thought they had gone somewhere to get over their grief. We used to get reports of various actions. But there were also people who were using their names. In fact, Begum Sahiba issued a letter stating people were using the name of Mir Murtaza Bhutto. We have always wondered if violence once inducted into society would not be difficult to eradicate.

Q. *It's been often reported that when the* MRD *was initially formed, you were against the* PPP *joining it but you were overruled by your elders.*

A. That's utter nonsense. In the early stages I may not have been keen on it but we did understand the concept of forming alliances with pocket parties who have constituencies be it in provinces or certain districts. Basically if you were agreed on democracy, then it was all right. You had to fight a common enemy.

Q. *The* MRD *is now seen as a khichri—a hotchpotch of left, right, centrist and moderately Islamic elements. You don't have a common programme or a common leader.*

A. We all maintain our programmes. What is democracy? Democracy is choice. Firstly we agreed on democracy—the choice being between the military dictatorship versus the leftist-rightist-moderates. Once we have democracy, it is for people to choose which programme they believe in, which party they believe will deliver the goods to them. We want to leave the people of Pakistan with the choice.

Q. *Early last month the acting general secretary of the* MRD *Malik Qasim announced a temporary suspension of the agitation at a press conference. If this report is correct, what is the next step?*

A. Well, I have heard about these press reports too. Look, we don't have a free press and these reports are not often authentic. We do not have confirmation nor information. Because we are a closed society the stories that appear are victims of the very nature of such a society.

Q. *Maulana Shah Ahmed Noorani of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan had recently alleged that General Zia used troops, helicopters and firebombs in his clean-up operations against anti-martial law protestors in Sind. In your opinion how credible are these reports?*

A. There are widespread allegations about army atrocities in Sind. Because I was

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under detention I do not have access to these sources. Nonetheless there were amazing stories of crops being burned, bodies being discovered in the sugarcane fields, of men, women and children being machine-gunned. One of our people told me that an officer who had served in Bangladesh said the situation here was worse than it had been in Bangladesh. Massive force has been used. They had gone around arming even chowkidars with guns in each village asking them to defend themselves against Al Zulfikar. A doctor in Nawabshah says they were not allowed to do post mortems on dead bodies to keep the casualty figures low. The army does not realise the depth of the people's resentment. The whole of rural Sind has become revolutionised.

Q. ***General Zia's new timetable for election in Pakistan is now 1985. Do you think this time the deadline will be kept?***

A. I don't understand how you are talking about deadlines for elections. Since July 1977, when we heard fair, free and impartial elections will take place under the Constitution of 1973 and since they were later postponed to October 1977, we have not heard the words fair, free and impartial election ever again. Yes, we have heard of the schemes of collection, and other unconstitutional schemes. If in this intervening period, the military regime decides to hold elections, great. It's good for the federation, good for all those who benefit from the federation.

After all, we are not an outside force —none of us can pick up our hats like the British did and say the sun has set on the Empire and we are leaving. We have to live there and we have to die there. So if the people have to be given a fair choice, they want to be masters of their own destiny, these frauds of selection and other schemes that are thought to put the civilians aside—it is just civilian facade. As patriots we hope the next five months will bring good news for the country.

Q. ***General Zia has said that the PPP will be disqualified and will never be allowed to rule again.***

A. Who will disqualify whom? Only the masses have the right to disqualify their leaders. Only the masses have the right to choice, the choice of the ballot to reject their leaders. So what are we up to? What do we hope to gain? Do we hope to gain an extension of the kind of military dictatorship? Do we hope to gain a civilian order? Well, if these are the aims and objectives, then 'selection' is a good gamble and then try your luck. You may fail, you may win. But we have been going on with this we-may-fail, we-may-win situation since 1977. Ad hocism has prevailed since 1977.

Q. ***A lot has been said and written about the Islamisation programme of General Zia. What do you have to say about it?***

A. What Islamisation? When somebody says it's winter, you don't take him at his word. You look around to see the accompaniments are there. Are people wearing overcoats? Have the trees shed their leaves? Is the weather freezing? We had an Islamic, democratic, representative, unanimous Constitution. When the Islamic Constitution is over-



"There are widespread allegations about army atrocities in Sind. There were amazing stories of crops being burned, bodies being discovered in the sugarcane fields, of men, women and children being machine-gunned."

thrown, how can you be acting in the name of Islam? When you declare that shariat courts which exercise the law of God are subordinate and inferior to the verdict of martial law courts, then how can you talk of serving Islam? How can you talk of the supremacy of Islam when you overturned the Islamic Constitution and imposed upon it a military court, a military tribunal, a military regulation which have nothing to do with Islam?

How can you say people detained under martial law cannot challenge under God's law their detention, their imprisonment, their confiscature of properties, their lashes, their death sentences? Every dictator tries to clothe his evil designs behind this mask. So why should we blame one particular person for doing so? It is for the journalists and the people to use their minds, their consciousness to see what the accompaniments are to it.

Q. ***You mentioned an existing Islamic Constitution. What were its features?***

A. Why, when the PPP was in power, Friday was declared a holiday. Haj was made permissible for everybody. Now it is according to a lottery. The 90-year-old Kamiabi issue was solved by Parliament. I won't say PPP solved it but Parliament did. It has now risen once again. We had covered every single aspect. What are the new features? Zakat? It is now just a military tax. The actual fact in your heart you want blessings from God and you give your little share. Because you seek and invoke God's blessings. But why a mandatory cut? People now moan and bemoan it. And being a Muslim is contingent upon God's law. It is not contingent upon state's law.

If today I am in England where there is no Muslim law, it doesn't mean I don't obey God's law. I can offer my prayers, I can fast, I can go on my pilgrimage, I can write my will according to the principle of the Quran Shareef. I can even have marriage vows performed according to it, I can have my death ceremony performed according to it. By being in a Muslim state or in a non-Muslim state, does not affect my religion because I follow God's law which is universal and not state's law which is confined to one region.

Q. ***Indo-Pak relations have reached a new low. Each country has mutually accused the other of meddling in their internal problems, the Sind and the Sikh problem in Punjab. There have been accusations that Indians have aided the MRD movement.***

A. Indians are not the only ones who have allegedly aided the MRD movement. The Americans have aided it, the Russians have aided it, the Indians have aided it. What proof have they offered? When we made the charge some time ago, about being destabilised by a foreign power, it was not through press conferences and side remarks. We presented to Parliament a 50-page document substantiating the charges. These charges are now being made to divert the attention of the people. However the struggle here is the struggle of the people of Pakistan. Outside powers cannot help us. Our struggle is our own, we are fighting for our rights, our own interests. However, when people are fighting against injustices, sometimes you may make statements.

Q. ***You had been to Simla and you know Mrs Gandhi. How do you view the current problems affecting Indo-Pak relations?***

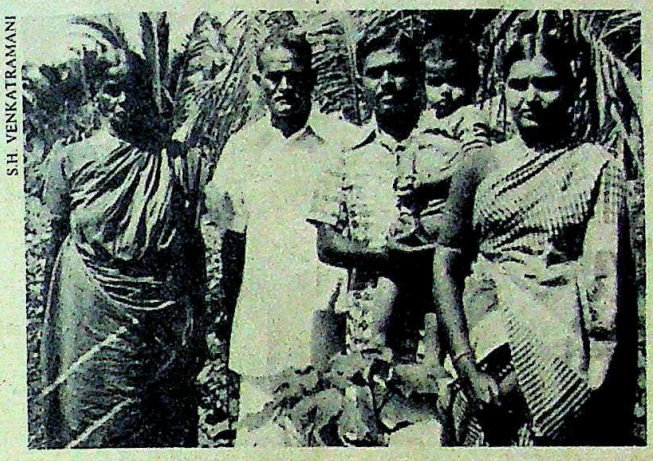
A. India is a very important country and it is ruled by a very important personality who has widespread contacts and experience acquired over decades. It is our neighbour and we should live in peace after an honourable settlement.

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TAMIL NADU

Birth of a Dream



S.H. VENKATRAMANI

TO THE casual visitor, Ayyampudur might seem an unremarkable village, much like thousands others all over the country. But one fact distinguishes the nearly 600 citizens of this sunny little hamlet 400 km south-east of Madras in Periyar district of Tamil Nadu: they take family planning very seriously. Each household has just two children, and at the most three. Says a proud A.M. Karuppanna Gounder, 60, village chief and president of the local milk producers' cooperative society: "We have been planning our families not just for the last 10 years, but for the past two generations."

"We have been planning our families not just for the last 10 years, but for the past two generations."

—A.M. Karuppanna Gounder

Karuppanna Gounder is one of two brothers. He himself has just two sons. "The eldest," he says, "is an engineer in Philadelphia in the US. He is married and has two children. My younger son, K. Dorairaj looks after our lands here, and has only one son, Senthil." Chinnasami Gounder, 50, who owns 10 acres of agricultural land in the village, is also one of two brothers and has just one son, studying in Madras. A.C.S. Mani has only one son, no one brother. Mani's father also had just one brother—evidently the small family has been a village tradition. Says Mani: "I am not going to risk a second child. If it turns out to be a son, I will have to divide my small holding of 5 acres of land."



S.H. VENKATRAMANI

"I am not going to risk a second child. If it turns out to be a son, I will have to divide my small holding of 5 acres of land."

—A.C.S. Mani

This is what makes Ayyampudur an oddity on the map: while India's population shot up 24.99 per cent between 1971 and 1981 —an average annual rate of 2.5 per cent, this little village showed an increase of a modest 0.64 per cent annually. In the past decade, the population of the village rose from 547 to 582, according to the 1981 census. Today it stands at nearly 600, but that is due to the presence of migrant labour. Other villages in the district display the same rare trend—the population of nearby Kuravampalayam has been increasing by 0.79 per cent annually and grew from 482 in 1971 to 520 in 1981. In Chalavaikalpayamit has risen by 1 per cent—from 194 in 1971 to 218 in 1981.

Community Tradition: Ayyampudur's village head, and indeed almost all his fellow-citizens, are Gounders who dominate both Periyar district and the neighbouring Coimbatore district. Gounders form 75 per cent of the population of Periyar, and over 50 per cent of Coimbatore. The success of family planning is closely linked to the life- style of the community. Remarks C. Aranganayagam, state education minister, and a Gounder himself: "Family planning is an integral part of the Gounder culture."

Traditionally agriculturists, almost each Gounder family here has a small farm —often between 2 and 15 acres on an average. Their determination to limit their families is characteristically rooted in pragmatism. Explains Karuppanna Gounder: "If a family has more than one son, the father's land holding will have to be divided, and will thus get fragmented."

The average family landholding is 5 acres—no family has permitted them to fall below that. The average family's monthly income around Rs 1,000. In other comparable villages, the average family landholding is around 2 acres, the monthly family income about Rs 500 to R 600, and with each household having six to eight members, it is a hand-to-mouth existence.

Increasingly, this generation of Gounders is limiting itself to just one child per family. Says A.A. Rajan, a farmer owning 6 acres: "I have one son, and I am not going to have any more children. If I can bring him up well, that is all I want." In fact, economic necessity dictates that most families today have only two children at the most—and even that, only if the first child is a girl. While the son looks after the land on his own, the daughter is given her share of the family wealth in terms of jewellery and some cash, which ensures her marriage to a fellow Gounder with land. Karuppayal has two daughters, and would not think of having another child in the hope of having a son.

Pragmatic Approach: This attitude has ensured the increasing popularity of scientific family planning methods. Says a lady doctor attached to the Government Hospital at Gobichettypalayam, the taluk headquarters: "We now do about 250-300 tubectomies at our hospital every month, and about half-a-dozen vasectomies. The figures have been almost doubling from year to year." Dr N.S. Sathia Sundari, who runs a private nursing home in the same town, adds that Gounder women are not only willing to undergo such operations, they are also willing to pay for them. Medical termination of pregnancy is not uncommon. Says Dr C. Jayalakshmi: "Most of them prefer to be sterilised after their first son or second child."

Significantly, the idea of family planning has just not caught on in other communities in the same region. Harijans, for instance, seem totally unimpressed by such ideas. Says one, who works on Karuppanna Gounder's land: "I have two sons and two daughters, and I don't use any family planning methods." His fellow-worker Rangan explains why: "We have no land. We can send our children to work on the fields and get some more money." Despite that little inconsistency, Ayyampudur and its neighbouring villages are certainly examples of the kind of success story family planning officials dream about.

—S. H. VENKATRAMANI

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THE CONSUMER

WHEN A.S. Bhatia, an expatriate engineer settled in the US, returned to India last month for the first time in seven years, he couldn't believe his eyes. "I wouldn't have thought that Delhi was the same place I'd lived in. Roadside stalls selling imported goods, lines of TV and video shops, and video libraries everywhere you look. All this was stuff I would never have imagined was possible when I left."

Bhatia could have added to that list if he had walked into some middle-class homes: apart from colour TV and video, he would have found new ovens, grillers, mixer-grinders and toasters in the kitchen, vacuum cleaners and washing machines where earlier there were none, a new unrecognisable range of packaged foods, dressier tableware and kitchenware, vastly superior furnishings, room coolers, geysers, a new scooter, moped or even car, and much else.

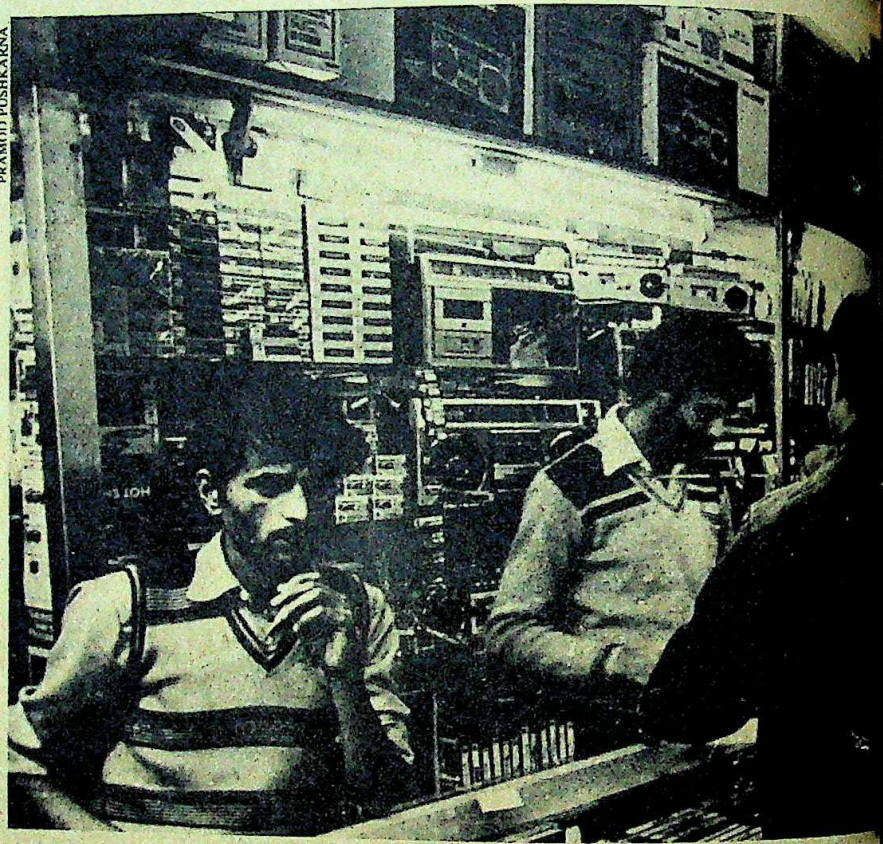
A closer study of people's habits would have shown him the much greater use of cosmetics, a new passion for photography, and the casual assumption that electronic watches and music systems are everyday facts of life. He would have found a greater tendency to eat out, perhaps in the new breed of fast-food joints that have mushroomed everywhere, and people willing to spend more freely on bottled soft drinks, or on a previously unknown and relatively expensive range of flavours in ice creams.

Unprecedented Boom: Even from what he saw at first sight, his response was: "This place is beginning to look like some kind of consumer's paradise." While that is over-stating the case, there is little doubt that a consumer goods revolution is sweeping the country.

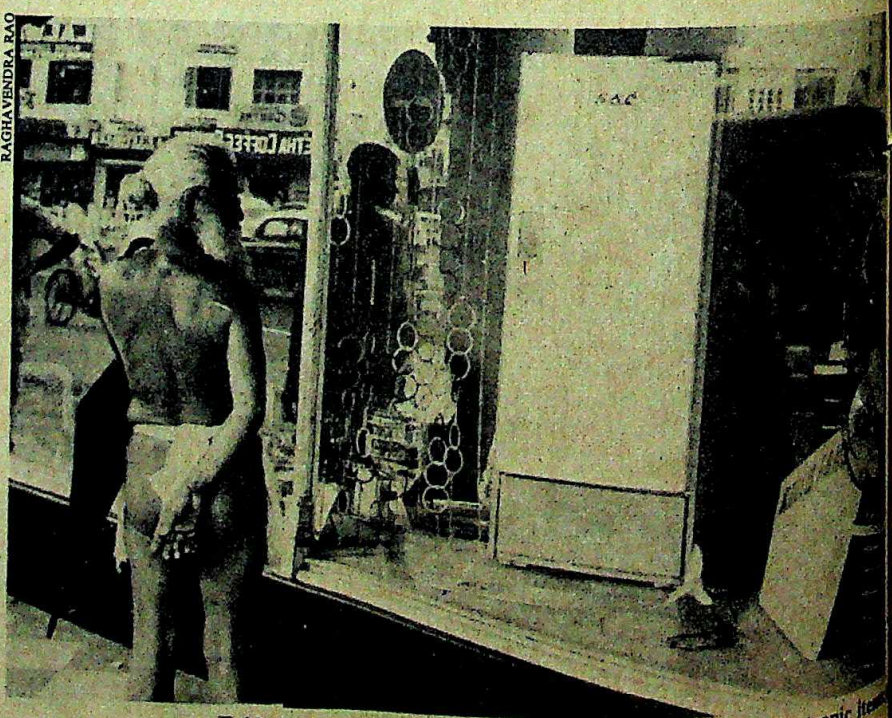
It is incongruous in a country like this one, and before it actually happened in the last few years, most people would have considered it improbable. But the figures do not lie: in 1965-66 (not such a long time ago, when you think of it) only 500 people owned a TV set. Four years ago the total was 1.1 million. Now the figure is approaching 3 million, and in another two to three years will hit 10 million—equivalent to every household in the six or seven biggest cities owning a set. The Government is in fact planning to hit an annual production level of 4 million in a couple of years.

Just around twenty years ago, there were barely 90,000 two-wheelers on the road. Now the figure is more than 2 million, and in another five years annual production will be 2 million. In the mid-1960s, only 30,000 refrigerators were produced annually. Now it is 10 times that number. Likewise, sales of mixer-grinders have grown from 40,000 in 1970 to 3 lakh today. And radios and transistors have seen their population

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



RAGHAVENDRA RAO



Evidence of the consumer boom: (clockwise from top) electronic ite

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BOOM





...le Delhi, processed foods and window-shopping in Madras

multiply ten fold in 20 years, to 25 million. So say the official statistics, but since much of transistor production and ownership is unregistered the actual number could well be 35 million.

These growth rates have not been matched by any other sector of the economy, whether agriculture, basic industry or anything else, and tell the clear story of the consumer finally making himself felt in the market-place. While the economy grows at less than 5 per cent, the annual growth in demand for most consumer goods now varies between 10 and 20 per cent, sometimes even more.

The growth in numbers has been matched by a growth in the range of goods on offer, from moulded travel luggage to multi-chime doorbells, and from expensive plastic toys to flavoured yogurts and a much wider range of floor coverings. Upmarket, there is the sudden burst of fashion garment brand-names like Charagh Din and Ravissant, and downmarket a countless variety of inexpensive cosmetics and personal care items.

Burgeoning Variety: The market has also grown in sophistication and variety. basic record-players and tape-recorders have given way to more ambitious music systems incorporating the latest international features and offering high-quality sound reproduction. Mundane things like gas stoves have been transformed into exciting combinations of cookers, grillers and ovens. Workaday suitcases have given way to expensive moulded luggage. And across the country middle and even lower-income homes now consider items like pressure cookers and room coolers indispensable necessities. The market is in fact now taking in such gadgets as electric pressure cookers, infrared superfast cookers, and also electric slow cookers.

Says Siddhartha Sen, head of Hindustan Lever's personal products division: "We have to start re-defining our concepts of essentials and non-essentials. We have to decide who today's buyer is and what he perceives as necessary for his household."

The new urge to splurge has also led to the surest sign of new consumerism: a plethora of credit cards, ranging from Diners Club to Visacard (from Andhra Bank) and Central Bank of India's Centralcard. Most recently, motorists' credit cards have hit the market—Gold Pass and Auto Card—and the large hotel chains have their own exclusive credit card systems. Diners, launched in the early 1960s, took 20 years to hit a membership of 20,000. Visacard, launched in 1980, hit the same figure in three years, and an Andhra Bank spokesman says the target for next year is 75,000.

Convenient Gadgets: The degree of change in less than a generation's time span

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is often not recognised in its magnitude, but is nevertheless without precedent. In Madras, housewife Usha Reddy recalls that her mother used to cook sambar on firewood in traditional vessels. But Usha's kitchen has a modern cooking range that runs on electricity and cooking-gas, an oven and a wet grinder. "When you have a couple of school-going children, these gadgets become a must," says Usha. "Also, guests turn up suddenly and you have to cook something fast." She and her husband Sudhakar, who has a consumer goods dealership, also have a refrigerator, a TV set that was first black-and-white but is now colour, and recently acquired a video set as well.

The Reddy family is typical of the new consumer in both the kind of goods they have bought as well as the speed with which they have acquired them —and also a good example of the changes in life-style that underlie the explosion in the market for consumer goods. People have become more house-proud, there is more money to spend, and a willingness to spend it—even on such unconventional gadgets as vacuum cleaners. A spokesman of Eureka-Forbes, which markets vacuum cleaners, said they expected to sell 100 sets every month in a city like Bangalore, but last year actually sold 3,000. Even more interestingly, said the spokesman: "There is no telling who will buy it. People who are schoolteachers are picking it up. There seems to be a totally new breed of consumers around, and their income is no basis on which to judge them."

Better Living: Nevertheless, the consumer goods boom could hardly have come about without a general increase in prosperity—or at least a new-found ability to spend cash. The in-house research bureau of a major consumer products company discovered during its market surveys in the major cities that people are now vastly better off than before. A study of the four major metropolises in 1982 showed that 45 per cent felt they were better off than five years earlier, and another 42 per cent felt their income level was the same. Optimism regarding the future infects the majority: 54 per cent felt their spending power would improve over the next five years, and very few thought they would actually be worse off than before.

There is other evidence too to support the claim that people now have more money in their pockets. Till five years ago, the annual investment in new company shares and debentures totalled barely Rs 100 crore a year. That figure has now jumped virtually overnight to Rs 1,000 crore, and numerous companies who earlier counted their shareholders in thousands now do so in lakhs.

NOT surprisingly then, market surveys in the cities have shown that over a 10-year time span, the percentage of households owning most consumer goods would treble. One such survey, by a professional market research organisation, showed that "the Indian woman's attitude to household appliances has changed dramatically". Ninety-five per cent of them now consider a pressure cooker a necessity, 85 per cent felt it was essential to have a gas connection, and as many as 60 per cent felt they must own a refrigerator. Given the total population in India's cities—160 million in 1981—these are enormous figures and give statistical backing to the high-visibility consumer goods explosion that is taking place.

RAGHAVENDRA RAO



A wandering minstrel has his own music-box: a sign of the times

Most such surveys usually leave the very poor households outside their ambit as being commercially irrelevant. And certainly in the remoter rural areas the changes in consumer habits are restricted to such items as plastic buckets and sandals. Nevertheless, there is no disputing the fact that the middle class —defined by both income levels and life-style aspirations—now constitutes a much broader band in any statistical ordering of the total population.

Increasing Urbanisation: A broad range of social changes is equally behind the rapid transformation in attitudes to domestic appliances. At one level, there is the rapid growth of urbanisation (the number of people in the 150 largest towns, each with a population of over 1 lakh, has trebled since 1960), accompanied by the breakdown of the joint family system and the parallel rise of the unitary family. In a third simultaneous development, women have started leaving home for work. And finally, domestic help has become increasingly scarce and expensive in the big cities.

Any of these would have brought about an increase in consumer spending on labour-saving devices. Put together, the combination of all four factors has been explosive. Urbanisation has brought about a basic change in attitudes to work and leisure, and women who are busy with work have neither the time nor the patience for laborious domestic chores. Working women also provide the second income in the family, which pays for the new gadgets.

Dr Sarojini Lakshmanan's home in Bombay is typical of an increasing number of middle class households in which the women also work. Born in Cannanore at a time when drinking water had to be manually drawn from the backyard well, the practising doctor now uses a Sumeet mixer-grinder, an Everest washing machine and clothes drier, a cooking range and an oven to help her complete household work before her patients come in during her consulting hours. Nektar dry chutneys, Gits dosa mixes and sweets, iced teas, and a range of other convenience foods help with the cooking too. Says Lakshmanan: "Time is crucial for all women who have two important jobs to perform, and these things save so much labour. Also, servants throw such tantrums these days, so a washing machine is a great boon."

Consumer Consciousness: "Aspirations have moved in two basic directions," says a market research specialist in Bombay. "The first is to get devices that will help people save time; and the second follows from the first: once they have got the time on their hands, they look for ways to spend it." The first has brought about the spurt in domestic work-saving appliances; the second has caused the boom in the sales of home entertainment items—video sets already number half a million.

The spurt in consumer buying is not restricted to the upper class, or even the middle class. Aspirations for consumer durables have stretched down to income groups which would normally not have been considered part of the the market for what are after all relatively expensive gadgets. Thus, Ajay Mathur, director of Mathur Micro Motors and Appliances (makers of Sumeet mixers)

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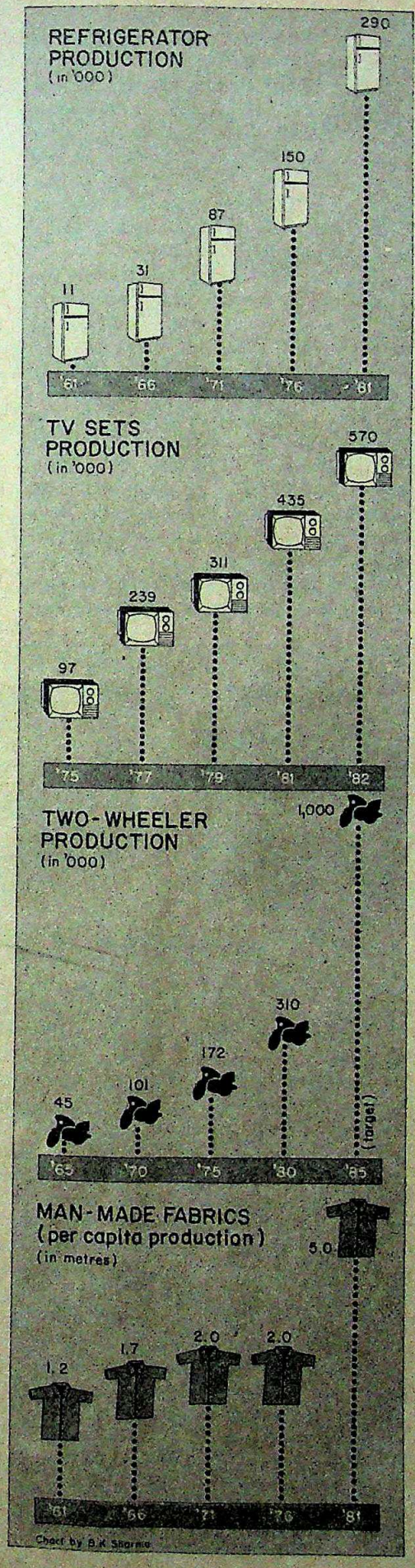
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points out: "We find that many of our buyers are in the monthly income range of Rs 800 to Rs 1,000 upwards." That point is also made by P.A. Kambli, general manager of Apna Bazar, Bombay's department store chain. "Consumer consciousness has increased so much that even industrial labour wants to have pressure cookers, mixers, and even non-stick frying pans." In many cities, the poorer women get hire purchase arrangements on items like pressure cookers.

People like Lakshmi Singh and her husband Mahavir in the lower-middle class colony of Humayunpur in New Delhi are a perfect example of this trend. Mahavir is a compounder in a south Delhi hospital. His wife does domestic chores in middle class homes. Together, they get take-home earnings of a little over Rs 1,000. Not, you might think, your idea of the hungry consumer. Yet they cram into their tiny two-room tenement a steel cupboard, a television set and a gas range. The couple's teen-aged son has been given Rs 500 to book a new scooter (which will cost Rs 10,000 when it comes), and the daughter is pressing for the acquisition of a refrigerator: "What will the *barat* party think of a house that doesn't have a fridge?" Lakshmi herself battles the Delhi cold in a torn woollen shawl, but her fingernails have nail polish on them.

Acquisitiveness: P.N. Rajamani is a supervisor in Hindustan Aeronautics in Bangalore, and takes home Rs 10,000 a month. But three of his children are working —so their home has a refrigerator bought two months ago, a TV set bought last year, and a scooter. The mixer-grinder is in the bedroom, next to a transistor, a tape recorder and two steel almirahs. Says Rajamani's youngest son, Jayaram, 24: "We bought the TV last year for entertainment. I don't know why we have now bought a fridge. We've never used one before, but I suppose my mother wanted to store vegetables and milk."

Multiple incomes are clearly an important explanation for the fact that people seem to have substantial disposable incomes. And as in Rajamani's case, working children who have yet to start their own homes provide the cash cushion for new creature comforts —so that even the remnants of the joint family system contribute to freer spending. But the simple fact also is that the face of the Indian consumer has changed. There was a time not long ago when the prospective customer was the salaried middle class: company executives, senior civil servants, the armed forces. But these have given way to a more spendthrift society made up of such unpretentious tradesmen as paanwallas, small businessmen, the growing armies of the self-employed, exporters, even taxi operators, and the more status-conscious pro-



fessionals like doctors and lawyers. Small-scale entrepreneurs alone have quadrupled in the last decade—from 1.4 lakh to 6 lakh —giving a powerful new impetus to consumer demand.

Multiple Incomes: Then there are the large numbers who moonlight in order to make the extra buck, or teachers who more than double their salaries by giving private tuitions. In one way or another, most of these manage to escape the rigours of the tax system and, equally important, they are willing to spend their money on consumer appliances and domestic conveniences.

At the same time, in the rural areas the green revolution has created large pockets of previously unimaginable prosperity. The gentleman farmer has come into his own and wants the comforts and conveniences of the city in his farmhouse. In the prosperous terai region of western Uttar Pradesh, P.N. Mehta has no fewer than six TV sets—one each for himself and his five sons. And in the Punjab, washing machines often do double duty as butter-churners!

EVEN among the salaried sections, income levels have changed, sometimes dramatically. The minimum wage in many companies is now between Rs 1,200 and Rs 1,500 in cities like Bombay and Pune, and even drivers in some of the established companies get more than Rs 3,000 a month.

Inflation, too, seems to help the boom along in contrary fashion. Land and flat prices have sky-rocketed beyond the means of most, so their savings are channelled instead into consumer goods. Argues Mukund Mahajan of Operations Research Group, which conducts market and consumer surveys for consumer products: "In metropolitan areas one of the major reasons for saving was to upgrade one's life-style by moving into a larger home. This has become virtually impossible now. So a family which knows it cannot afford to shift from a one-room flat to a two-bedroomed one, tries to improve the existing flat by putting its savings into TVs, refrigerators and other symbols of status."

This trend is most visible in Bombay's congested central residential areas. On the streets around Bhendi Bazar, the skyline is an uninterrupted maze of TV antennae, but the tenement houses below are small and cramped, large joint families sharing two and three-room flats with little hope of moving to more spacious premises. In Girgaum, many crumbling apartment houses now sport colour TV sets, and in the distinctly lower class Naigaum belt, cassette recorders, mixers and other relatively cheap durables have appeared increasingly.

Increasing prices do not seem to have affected sales in other cities either.

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In Bangalore, M. Ramchand, owner of a large shop in the busy B.V.K. Iyengar Road, says: "In 1977, when the price of a mixer was about Rs 500, I sold hardly one piece a month. Now, the price is up to Rs 1,300, but we sell at least 15 pieces a month. The consumer these days does not seem to be so bothered about the price."

Not surprisingly, then, there is an overwhelming response to new scooter and moped bookings: millions of hopefuls have forked out over Rs 150 crore for the pleasure of waiting in line for new two-wheelers, another Rs 135 crore has been forked out to book Marutis, and even the expensive and clunky Contessa of Hindustan Motors has created a stir in the market-place. In the second half of 1982, a new scheme for importing gifted colour TV sets saw over 60,000 coming in, in just a month's time; domestic sets assembled from imported kits sold another lakh in a couple of months before the Asian Games. And although there are over 75 brands of mixer-grinders available in the market, Sumeet's Mathur confesses that he has a backlog of a year on bookings from his dealers. There seems almost no limit to the amount of money that can be forked out at short notice for expensive gadgetry. Even in a basic item like textiles, the consumer's imagination has been caught by polyester blends—threatening the future of the cotton textile industry but feeding a boom among powerlooms. Now supporting staff in government departments frequently list among their demands the substitution of khadi uniforms with polyster substitutes!

Consumers are also more aware of the existence of new conveniences than before, partly because of vastly greater exposure to the outside world. Hundreds of thousands of workers in West Asia return home annually armed with two-in-ones and video sets. These have a 'demonstration effect' just as much as the businessmen, executives and exporters who now travel abroad in far greater numbers than before, and who inevitably bring back a clutch of designer jeans, Revlon perfume, Gillette shaving systems and cordless telephones.

Travel Bug: In fact, foreign travel itself is now a part of the new consumerism. With the Government gradually easing up on its once tight-fisted policy on travel abroad for leisure, abolishing the dreaded 'P' form, increasing the foreign exchange allowance in stages from the intial $6 (around Rs 60) to $500 (around Rs 5,000), and now with an additional $430 (Rs 4,300) to $615 (6,150) thrown in to encourage group tours, virtually anyone with the cash can go on a holiday-cum-shopping trip abroad at will. Companies now regularly offer their dealers the reward of a holiday in Bangkok or Singapore, and senior executives consider a round-the-world ticket a legitimate item in the perquisites package. The official statistics on Indians going abroad are inadequate, but nevertheless report an eightfold multiplication of international travellers in 20 years—to 1.6 million. Says Avinash Anand, vice-president of Sita World Travel: "Group tours have become a booming business. We started our package tours in 1980, and business has been virtually doubling every year. And I know of at least a dozen large agencies who are doing similar business."

Liberal foreign travel is only one of the

CONSUMERISM

Counter Claims

FOR ALL its sweeping character and the increasing numbers drawn into its wake, the consumer goods boom has clear limitations and must be clearly understood for what it is and isn't. It isn't, for instance, a consumer revolution in the sense that a purist would understand the term.

Says Ajit Haksar, chairman emeritus of ITC: "This is not a consumer revolution. A real consumer revolution comes not when people lap up all the goods offered but when they start rejecting goods because of quality or price. What you really see in the market is a widening base of goods, and a new look being given to them."

Prakash Tandon, former chairman of Hindustan Lever and currently president of the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), finds, like Haksar, that the boom in consumer goods leaves him cold. "I don't see any consumer revolution at all," he argues. "The only thing that has happened is that some more brands of over-priced and shoddy goods are being palmed off on people who have loose black money lying around."

A real consumer revolution comes about, says Tandon, when the producer respects his consumer. "Most advertisements do not mention the price, many of them don't even tell you the product's special features. All they offer is glamour. The consumer is not respected, he is being taken for a ride." As examples of out-dated and high-priced goods he lists cars, refrigerators, entertainment electronics and housing—and also public sector monopolies like power, telephones and the railways. Tandon further argues that the majority of products are still elitist, without the effort to offer value for price.





Chitale, Haksar and Tandon: dissenting voices

Shoddy Goods: Haksar tends to agree, and feels this is a product of the quick-buck culture that he sees all around. And he adds the important rider that there is no boom at all in many traditional consumer fields, like textiles, or in the eastern states, where less money seems to be available for spending.

Both pundits' criticism of the developments in the market-place are eminently justified. Niky-Tasha, for instance, sells jazzed-up gas stoves that are essentially a copy of Japanese originals, at four to five times the price in Singapore. Domestic colour TV sets sell at three times the normal international price even when virtually all the components are imported, and despite this are often of indifferent quality.

Almost nobody is aiming at low margins and a mass market, with most manufacturers satisfied with small volumes but compensating for this with high margins. Haksar feels this could be because of the Government's policy of withdrawing a variety of concessions and incentives the minute a unit crosses from small-scale to medium-scale operations, so that there is no incentive for people to think big.

As for quality, Krishna Basrur, vice-president of the Consumer Guidance Society of India (cost) and convenor of its testing committee, discloses some shocking results that emerged from the society's tests on the quality of consumer products. Says he: "Because of a shortage of

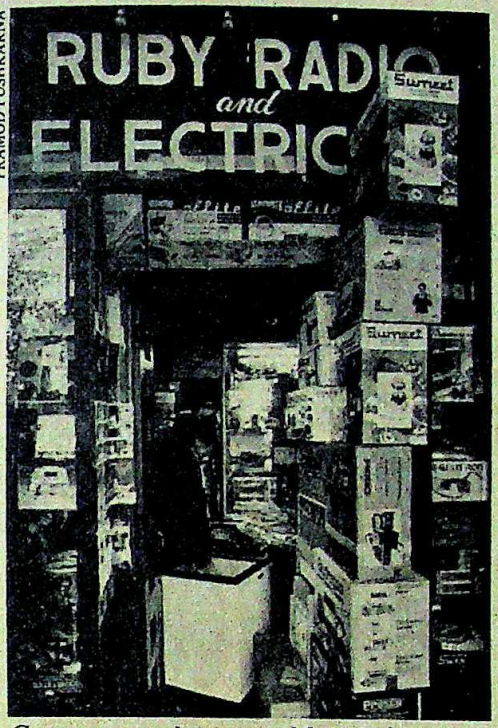
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many ways in which the Government has helped the new wave of consumer spending along. Marking a sharp change from the earlier policy of keeping down consumption (in order to generate savings that would be invested in steel plants and power stations), the Government is now actively playing the role of midwife to the new consumer age.

In the last couple of years, the Government has reduced customs duties on electronics goods, excise duties on such goods as refrigerators, raised the duty-free limit on personal baggage, and allowed the import of a vast variety of components that are used by domestic businessmen to assemble finished products. Easier licensing policies and a liberal attitude to new foreign collaborations have similarly opened the doors wide for new entrepreneurs, or even existing ones. Blow Plast, makers of VIP suitcases, signed up last year with Samsonite of the US for a new range of soft luggage. Also, in total contrast to the earlier policy of playing down the role of consumer electronics P.P. Gupta, secretary in the Department of Electronics, now talks of a "mass market" for even video cassette recorders, while the Government is hustling through with a programme to extend TV coverage from 23 to 71 per cent of the country.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Consumer goods crammed into a showroom

Indirect Benefits: Even basic investments by the Government, in such things as electricity and roads, have begun to have a pay-off for consumer goods manufacturers. In the early 1960s, only 22,000 of the country's 575,000 villages were electrified. Now the number totals 3 lakh creating a vast market for electric fans, TV sets and kitchen appliances. The road network has similarly expanded over the years and trebled in total length to 1.6 million kilometres. With even remote villages now linked by road, the two-wheeler market has become truly national, and led to the most spectacular growth in demand among all consumer goods items. Even the lowly bicycle has made rapid strides forward, and the country's annual production of around 5 million bicycles is next only to China's. Such development is likely to continue: in the next 20 years, three of the country's more developed states (Gujarat, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu) are likely to be more urban than rural. The change in

funds, we have tested only certain classes of goods. But in all of them we found that quality was poor, and the claims made by the manufacturers untenable."

Low Standards: Thus, in 1979, the Test tested pressure stoves. Of 22 pieces belonging to 11 brands that were tested, as many as 18 were substandard and failed safety tests. Among clinical thermometers, not a single one of those tested was accurate within the stipulated margins of error. Of a dozen electric irons tested in 1982, only five passed the test. Even three-pin electrical plugs failed the safety tests.

Basrur adds: "But our most shocking results were found in water filter candles, which are sold by large manufacturers like Bajaj, Voltas and Balsara. All of them claim that they make water 100 per cent germ-free. We tested seven samples, including all the leading brands, and all were substandard except for a model called Sudarshan, which is made by a small-scale manufacturer and based on a German model."

One very noticeable feature of the consumer goods boom is the new slickness, professionalism and often provocativeness of advertising that has supported the new products. But Basrur points out that many advertising claims are also "untenable". Examples: Modern Bakeries claimed that its bread was rich in protein although no protein supplement was added. Parke Davis's Neko soap is advertised as a medicated soap because it contains mercuric oxide, but Basrur says that mercury compounds are now known to be unsafe and harmful.

Consumer Exploitation: Numerous examples of consumer rip-offs abound. Although Indian cars are shoddy and thoroughly over-priced, the companies manufacturing them now charge a basic price that excludes the cost of basic fittings that were earlier a part of the car. In the Ambassador, the petrol cap now does not have a lock, and you have to pay extra for this and also for an ampere meter, clock, battery gauge, and oil pressure gauge. The additional price for these: Rs 800. Premier Automobiles has introduced a Padmini Special that has a few extra fittings but costs a great deal more; and consumers are forced to opt for this because production of the ordinary model has been sharply curtailed. Even in bicycles, manufacturers charge extra for the seat, handle covers and other fittings. Basrur feels that "the Government and the business community are jointly looting the consumer. The manufacturers feel they can get away with anything, and the Government considers everything a luxury and taxes it heavily."

Meanwhile, tax expert M.P. Chitale has more basic worries. Where are the funds coming from that fuel the boom in consumer goods? Are they draining the country's already scarce foreign exchange resources? Could the funds have been used elsewhere, where they would have benefited a larger number of people? Should a large-scale market be developed in consumer goods to bring down costs? If limited to small-scale activity, will this become yet another high-cost industry behind a high tariff wall? "I don't have the answers to these questions," says Chitale. "But someone like the Planning Commission should do a meaningful study of this since resources on a massive scale are going into consumer goods."

Many of Chitale's questions don't have easy answers, and the source of much of the money that is fuelling the consumer goods boom remains an enduring mystery in a country that has an annual per capita income of no more than Rs 2,000. The only plausible explanation is that while the majority stay in a condition of grinding poverty, a growing minority is able to launch on a hedonistic and very commercial consumption drive that accentuates the existing dualism in the economy. These trends are now likely to be further accentuated by the imminent advent of commercial TV, and the growing reach of both films and advertising through the ubiquitous video cafes.

While these involve basic issues concerning the pattern of economic development that should be followed, Haksar is optimistic about what might eventually result in the consumer goods market. "You already see more competition in the market, so there is greater consumer choice. The consumer is not yet king, but once you have competition the rest should follow."

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life-style and demand for goods, that this promises could well make today's developments seem like nothing more than the precursor of the real thing.

Businessmen are slowly waking up to the possibilities opened up by these long-term trends. Says K.K. Modi, vice-chairman of the Modi group of industries: "I see a massive growth ahead in the consumer field. When an economy grows, there is always a boom in consumer goods and personal care items." The Modis have already moved in recent years into cigarettes and carpets, and are now trying to tie up arrangements for introducing into the Indian market such way-out goods as Seagrams whisky and the full range of Christian Dior products: leather goods, scarves, ties, artificial jewellery, shirts among other luxury items.

OTHER well-known international brand-names too are likely to be introduced in India in the coming months as international business catches on to the existence of a burgeoning market in India. Last year, Casio of Japan was the second largest advertiser in the Indian press for electronic calculators. Sony, National, Sanyo and Fisher have also started flooding newspapers and magazines here with advertisements, aimed essentially at catching the eye of would-be travellers abroad: most advertisements mention the names and addresses of dealers in Hong Kong, Singapore and West Asia.

Pierre Cardin came visiting late last year, and announced plans to introduce his goods in India as well as open a Bombay branch of Maxims restaurant. Rothmans is already here in cigarettes, Revlon is negotiating with the Oswals, and even car manufacturers now see a market opening up. Nissan Datsun recently advertised the fact that it had won a car rally, while both Hertz and Avis are tying up with Indian companies for extending their car-hire operations. Yet other foreign brand names to feature here are Marmite bread spread, Sweet'N Low sugar substitute, and Tang. A Bombay entrepreneur, Shyamrao Chowgule, intends to produce French champagne in Nasik, in collaboration with Heidsick, while both Gillette and Wilkinson are giving a new edge to the market for shaving systems. The list goes on: the domestic Dynavox Electronics is marketing Kenwood stereo systems, and another local company offers stereo systems which, if you peel off a paper label, is revealed to be made by Akai. Cosmic in turn offers a Walkman in combination with an amplifier and detachable speakers.

Ajit Haksar, the chairman emeritus of ITC, is intensely critical of the invasion of foreign brands into the country ("We should be able to promote our own brands, because nothing ever came of a country that wasn't proud of its own products"), but the new trend seems unstoppable. Under a liberalised import regime, and the open acceptance of "screwdriver technology" that allows the assembly of imported sub-assemblies with nothing more than the turn of a screw, the country is becoming a lucrative market for the world's biggest producers of consumer goods.

Many of them are riding piggyback on local entrepreneurs eager to make good quickly with a recognised brand name, in the process often crippling genuine local business. Nishi Nakra, who markets his Enbee music systems, says the slump in stereo sales began with the import of colour TV sets. "At one time a good sound system was a status symbol. Now it is videos." And Baldev Advani, whose shop Berco's in the heart of New Delhi used to be the regular address for anyone wanting a music system, says sales in the last year have dropped by half because of imports. Nevertheless, the role of local entrepreneurship in the consumer goods boom cannot be denied. And a noticeable facet of the boom is the fact that it is being heralded, not by the large conglomerate business houses, but by new entrants trying to cash in on a new idea.

New Entrepreneurs: Thus, K.S. Mehta, a business consultant, has launched Gold Pass (a motorist's credit card) with some partners chipping in. Inder Sharma, head of Sita World Travel, is trying to introduce Avis cars into the country with a fleet of 300 vehicles, and A.B. Chopra, a former computer company employee, has launched Altos TV games with a big advertising splash, in the faith that "India is a sleeping consumer giant. You just have to tickle it in the right place". In Faridabad, outside Delhi, Woodworth has launched brand-name furniture with equipment from West Germany, Switzerland and Italy and offers chairs, beds and tables off the shelf. And even in Delhi, two former merchant navymen Rajiv Behl and Sati Arora have launched Fun Foods—flavoured yogurts, pre-cooked pizzas that just need warming, and soon milk shakes —with equipment that they designed and fabricated locally. Says Behl: "We are aiming at bachelors and families where the wife is working." Mehta of Gold Pass, Chopra of Altos, Behl of Fun Foods are all salaried personnel-turned-entrepreneurs who symbolise a new spirit of enterprise that is an inalienable part of the consumer goods boom.



Consumer advertising

There are also the super-success stories of those who have spotted new opportunities in the market-place and not only fuelled the consumer goods boom but also made their fortunes. The camera revolution, for instance, has swept India almost solely because of the imaginative flair of Abdullah Fazalbhoy, chief executive of Photophone, makers of Hot Shot cameras. Essentially a copy of a cheap Japanese camera and with a very high import content, Fazalbhoy nevertheless has the flair to launch a catchy advertisement campaign and move up front in the race for the camera market. In the process, camera sales have doubled in the space of a year, to 2 lakh, and "me-too" models have been introduced by Agfa-Gevaert and the public sector National Instruments. Fazalbhoy himself confesses to total surprise at the sudden spurt in the size of the market. His sales

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already 8,000 per month, a figure that he expects will soon quadruple.

His record in cameras is rivalled by that of Niky-Tasha in gas stoves. Run by Ritu Nanda, wife of Escorts president Rajan Nanda, Niky-Tasha showed the way to lighting up the stove market by re-designing workaday stoves to give them an attractive look, replacing heavy cast-iron bodies with lighter steel sheets, improving the looks and performance of such simple things as burner knobs, broadening the range of kitchen operations possible with a range of "novelty" stoves, and finally capping this multi-pronged effort with an unprecendented advertising blitz that had the customers flocking in growing at 60 per cent annually, and touched Rs 20 crore last year.

Other success stories include people like A.R. Balsara, who has bucked multinational giant Hindustan Lever in the toiletries market, and Gajanand Pendharkar's Vicco turmeric vanishing cream.

One major factor that emerges from these success stories is that growth has come in areas and for companies free from government regulation on either production or price—which also explains why the successes have essentially been outside the organised sector, in small-scale industry.

Competition has certainly enlivened the market-place and helped the boom along.



Symbols of the new hedonism

to replace even their existing stoves.

Says Vasant Zarapkar, proprietor of Zarapkar's, the Bombay-based hire-purchase agency: "Gas stoves have always been available, but it needed the Niky-Tasha advertising campaign to promote this concept of a replacement market for gas stoves. And, as you can see after the Niky-Tasha success, every manufacturer of stoves and grills is now using exactly the same advertising style."

Expanding Market: In the same class as this is Jal Engineer, one of the most successful technological innovators on the consumer marketing scene. Starting in the 1960s with a small-scale unit that produced cheap moulded footwear, he set up Blow Plast and VIP Industries in 1971 to expand his range to in the market. When financial difficulties forced him to sell out, Engineer in 1975 launched Universal Luggage and its Aristocrat range of suitcases. Sales have been

The camera market was as dull as an underexposed snapshot till Fazalbhoy showed how the market could be tapped, and everybody is now trying extra-hard to grab a slice of the rapidly growing pie. Even in areas like soft drinks, the proliferation of brand names (from barely a dozen eight years ago to three times that number now) has brought about a growth in sales of 250 per cent since 1976. Market leader Parle Exports alone has increased its sales from 6 million to 30 million cases (of 24 bottles each), and Parle's Managing Director Ramesh Chauhan estimates that demand is growing by 15 to 20 per cent annually. Typical of the savvy Indian businessmen who can almost outsmart Coca-Cola at its own game, Chauhan explains his success with the kind of one-liners that stand out in his advertisements: "Products don't sell, people do." His recent advertisement campaign using fun bottles and cricket souvenirs upped winter sales by as much as 60 per cent.

IN NUMEROUS other fields too, the proliferation of brand names has worked wonders in forcing the existing producers to deliver better value while the new entrants have offered the consumer greater choice, so that the total market has rapidly grown. The two-wheeler market has seen an explosion of range and size in the last four years, with the entry of Lohia Machines, Hero Majestic, TVS and numerous others, most of whom offer cheaper machines with vastly greater fuel economies while yet more are now revving up for the doubling of production that is planned in another four years.

Razor blades, to take another example, was virtually a monopoly of the Malhotra combine, so almost anyone who wanted a decent shave had to go in for an imported blade. Not any more: Wilkinson is here, and Gillette will be too. Even in such relatively new areas as washing machines, there is active competition in the market among such companies as Cleanfab and Uniwash, and in vacuum cleaners between Eureka-Forbes and Indus National.

Says Ram Sehgal from his vantage position as branch manager of the advertising agency Hindustan Thompson Associates: "There is a genuine change in the market situation for most products. There was no real competition earlier for numerous products, but now in many cases it is virtually a free-for-all."

And that observation is certainly true of even a basic item like vanaspati, once a virtual monopoly of Hindustan Lever, whose Dalda brand was then a synonym for hydrogenated vegetable oils. Not any more: there are at least 30 manufacturers, and some of them—like Amrit Vanaspati in Ghaziabad, outside Delhi—have rapidly increased market shares with the help of regional advertising.

Similar trends are evident in areas like detergents, where established brands like Surf have once again yielded ground to at least a dozen competing brands, including small-scale titans like Nirma who have used local advertising and regional markets to prepare the base for a national presence.

Sehgal makes the additional point that in a competitive situation the customer ultimately benefits: "Producers are forced to come up with new ideas and improvements in their products." That's very true of the gas stove market, because one manufacturer after another has announced improved thermal efficiency through better stove design. Some of the claims are probably fraudulent, but at least the effort now is to offer greater value for money.

Better Deals: The customer is getting a better deal in other ways too. Though the majority of Indian consumer goods continues to be generally shoddy and over-

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RAGHU RAI

Rural advertisement for a refrigerator: growing market

priced or technologically outdated, the prices of many items are falling, coming within the reach of larger numbers. Despite inflation, a refrigerator today costs no more than it did seven years ago, TV sets have become cheaper with a 12-inch set on offer for Rs 1,200, and video cassette recorder prices have crashed in little more than a year from Rs 50,000 to Rs 13,000. In Calcutta, Anand Agarwal of Capital Electronics points out that earlier the hottest selling items in his shops were transistors and tape-recorders. Now it is VCRs—because they are cheaper and mostly imported.

Aided by the global micro-electronics revolution, transistors, tape-recorders and calculators too have become steadily cheaper, and electronic wall-clock prices have dropped dramatically because of the cheaper availability of the integrated circuits that constitute the heart of the system. Watch prices too have dropped, and are likely to fall still further. The same goes for colour photography: the new cameras are cheaper, processing charges have dropped 25 per cent in six months, and printing costs dipped from Rs 6 to Rs 3.50. Added to this, colour film is now available at half the earlier price because of the entry of cheaper Japanese products. Explains Vasant Zarapkar: "When colour TV came in, everybody thought that black-and white sets would now not move. But we find that the clientele has changed downwards, and black-and-white sets are in fact moving a faster than before in our store."

Allied Trends: There have been other spin-offs because of the proliferation of brand names and growth of competition. Advertising (now a Rs 400 crore business) has come into its own, and the magazine boom of recent years is in part a result of pent-up pressure from advertisers for good media outlets: numerous publishers have their eyes trained on advertisements rather than readership. Packaging quality has also undergone a minor revolution. Haksar of ITC recalls that a few decades ago Red Lamp cigarettes used to sell in the Punjab in unsealed open 'tubes'. Says Haksar: "Nothing like that could sell today. You need an attractive pack design and must seal in tobacco freshness with paper and cellophane." Open tubes are certainly a far cry from the vastly superior packs that do the selling today of what is inside: in soaps, for instance, waxed wrapping paper has given way to polyester-coated paper for better moisture retention.

The far more significant change, however, has come in the form of market research, testified to by the rapid growth of agencies like the Indian Market Research Bureau, Pathfinders India, and Marketing and Advertising Research Group. With the market-place getting crowded, new products have to be positioned carefully in a precise market slot, and consumer needs and aspirations measured accurately lest what could be a Rs 1 crore advertising campaign end up as a failure. Says Sehgal of Hindustan Thompson Associates: "You have to find out the profiles of the market, and test advertising concepts and product shape, size and colour. Without these you might be totally wrong on what the market will accept."

Changed Life-styles: Elaborating on this, K. Kurien, chairman of Radeus Advertising and well-known commentator on advertising and marketing trends, says that there is a fundamental shift in that manufacturers are now trying to bring in tailormade products that fulfil changing aspirations. "We are moving from the primary stages of marketing to the third stage, when consumer taste is ascertained and then production geared to this. It is the change from the neighbourhood tailor to Charagh Din and fashion jeans, from home-cooking to convenience foods. I feel we are witnessing a change in life-styles which is matched by the production and marketing of things which people always needed but couldn't get in the past."

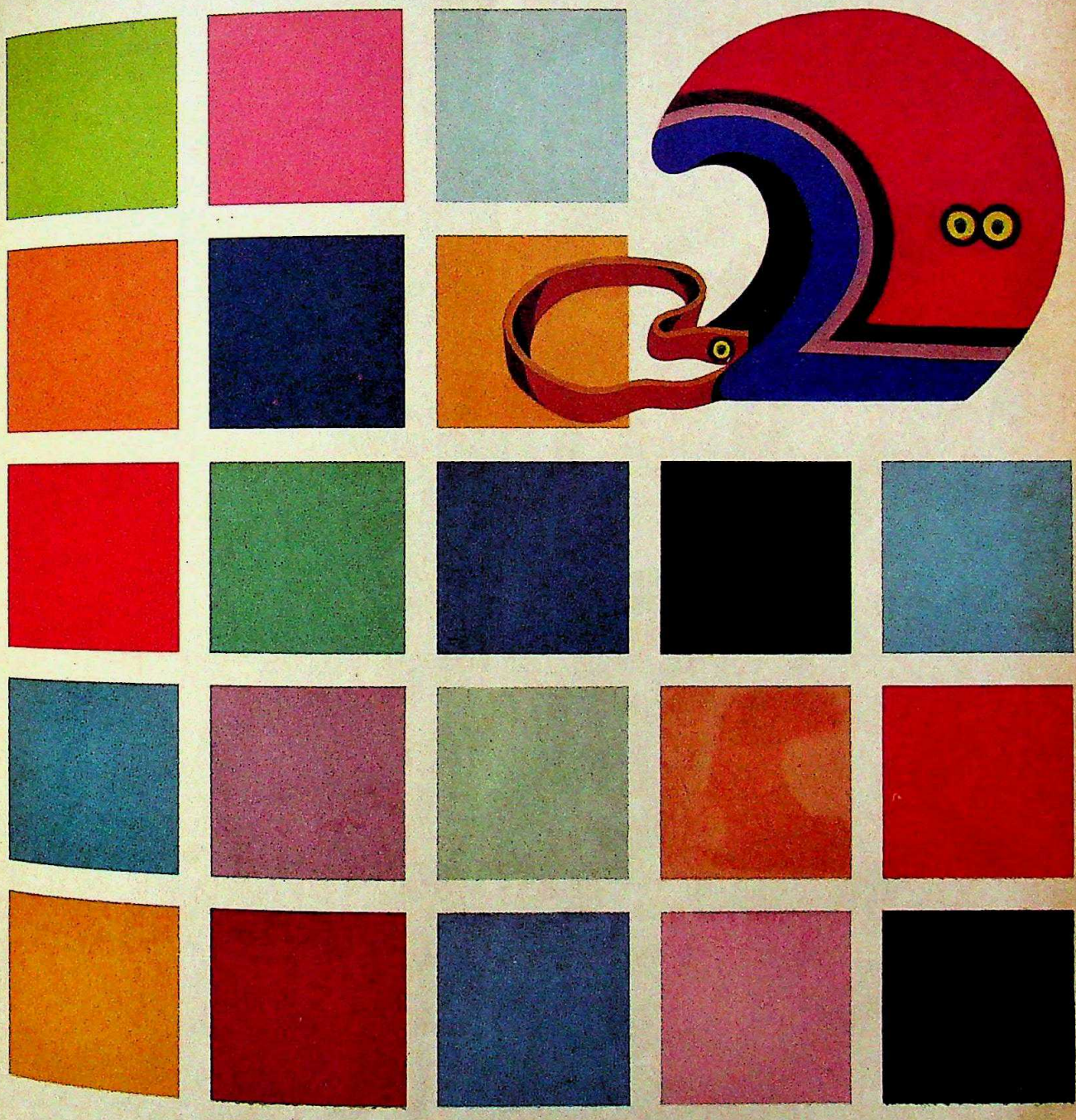
This opinion is seconded by the market research head of a large consumer goods company: "The techniques have certainly become more sophisticated, especially in data collection and processing." But in other ways what has happened so far is just the beginning: Britain has a consumer market roughly the same size as India's, but spends the equivalent of Rs 80 crore annually on market research, against Rs 5 crore in India. And there is still substantial scope for growth of professionalism in the business.

In the final analysis, however, all these have only played supporting roles in the ongoing drama of the market-place. From the start, the centre-stage has belonged to the consumer who has forked out good money for expensive goods, even when he doesn't always seem to be able to afford them. He has been willing to try out new concepts in conveniences, and grown a little wiser over the years regarding quality. Along the way he has been deceived once in a while by hyped-up advertising, or discovered that an electrical gadget doesn't work the way it should. But he has persisted, partly because though India isn't an affluent society it has become an acquisitive one, and partly because in the final analysis, there is no other way he can act: when incomes rise, people will insist on living better. —T. N. NINAN and CHANDER UDAY SINGH with bureau reports

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COMPUTING CHANGES

THE GOVERNMENT has decided to work out a new computer manufacturing policy. This follows the virtual failure of its present policy, under which over a hundred applicants had been licensed to undertake the manufacture of mini- and micro-computers: most of them are not making use of their letters of intent or licences. The Department of Electronics is also working out a new policy for the manufacture of computer peripherals, with one proposal being to reserve a number of areas as the exclusive territory of the public sector Computer Maintenance Corporation. The manufacture of large computer systems has already been reserved for the public sector, so that private sector applicants like the Tatas have been cold-shouldered. In mini- and micro-computers, the decision to hammer out a new policy has meant a suspension of expansion licences for some companies that are already in the market, while in the field of peripherals even those who have obtained letters of intent now have to wait for the Government to frame a policy on the subject.

BANKING ON SAFETY

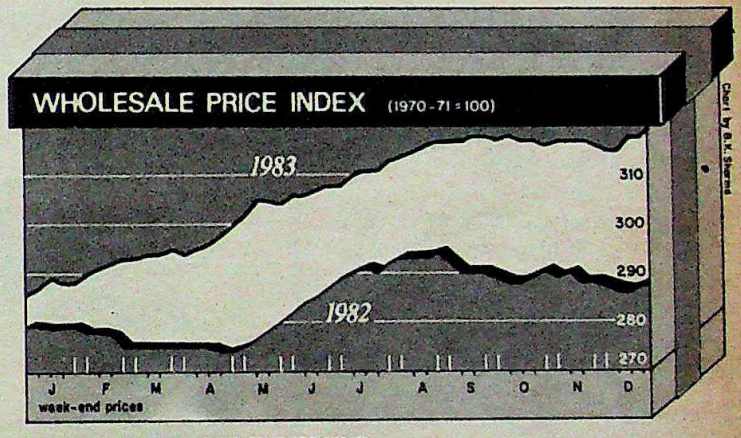
THE BOMBAY-based Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation is likely to raise its guarantee fees further and limit the insurance cover it provides on bank deposits and loans. This follows the increasing rate of defaults on bank loan repayments, and the possibility that defaults may rise still further once the Integrated Rural Development Programme and the loans for educated unemployed get into full swing. The corporation has already raised its guarantee fees and also reduced the limit of the insurance cover from 90 per cent to 75 per cent, but more steps in these directions are now likely. The guarantee fees may be raised further, and the limit of insurance coverage reduced further to 60 per cent in some cases. In an effort to ease the financial strain, the corporation has also asked the Government for permanent exemption from income tax liability.

COURT CRAFT

THE CONTROVERSIAL Calcutta-based Peerless General Finance and Investment Company has got a temporary reprieve from the Government's efforts to reduce the attractiveness of its deposit schemes, and thereby clip its wings. Under pressure from the Life Insurance Corporation (whose business had been getting affected by competition from Peerless), the Government had asked the public sector National Insurance Company to discontinue extending accident insurance cover to Peerless deposit-holders. This would have been a major blow to Peerless, which has always got the maximum possible promotional mileage by publicising the insurance cover. The company has consequently gone to court on the issue and managed to get a stay order. Following this, insurance cover is once again available at least temporarily.

MARUTI'S MARKET

MARUTI CARS now command hefty premiums on the re-sale market, ranging from Rs 35,000 to as high as Rs 60,000—the variable factor being the car colour! In some cases, the car company's authorised dealers themselves are playing the re-sale market: car allottees have been getting re-sale premium offers along with the letter intimating the car allotment. However, though there is no official bar on transferring the new car's ownership, the Delhi Administration for one has been acting sticky about registering a change of ownership. Despite such unexpected problems, it is clear that Maruti Udyog's delux model—bookings are to be announced shortly—will command a large market even at inflated prices. The regular model, likely to become more costly after March 1985, is clearly likely to retain its market appeal.



INFLATIONARY TRENDS

THE YEAR 1983 will go down as a period during which inflation once again became a major public problem. Wholesale prices rose 11.4 per cent during the year (up from less than 3 per cent in 1982). Retail prices fared even worse, rising 13 per cent in 12 months to November. The most worrying part of this was the fact that prices continued to rise despite a record bumper crop. In fact, the kharif harvest season—normally a period when prices drop—saw a very brief lull last year. Prices fell for no more than 11 weeks, compared to 16 weeks, in 1982 and a full 8 months a year before that. Consumer prices, meanwhile, have maintained a continuous rise now for almost two years: the last time they dropped was in March 1982. With a budget now round the corner, the inflationary spurt can only gain momentum.

STRENGTHENING THE BASE

THE RESERVE Bank is planning several measures to improve the performance of Indian commercial banks abroad. Following increasing evidence of large loans turning into doubtful or bad debts, problems with bank customers, and a failure of bank control systems, the RBI has decided to upgrade its audit system, perhaps open its own London office to monitor events, and hold training conferences for bank managers posted abroad. The RBI has also decided to strengthen the asset base of Indian banks by doubling the tax-free transfer of profits to reserves from 20 per cent of profits to 40 per cent, so that the deposits to assets ratio does not cross 2.5:1. At the moment almost all Indian banks operating abroad have a poor asset base, and as a result of this, tend to get what the RBI rates as second grade custom, which in turn brings problems with large loans. A stronger asset base may help Indian banks attract the best international banking customers and solve the problem.

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ORWELL AND INDIA

Economic Newspeak



I PROPOSE to write about George Orwell this time, not about economics, at least not about economics as commonly defined or understood. Orwell died 34 years ago this month (January 21, 1950) five days before our first Republic Day, which is as good a reason as any to write about him in his own year of 1984. There is also another reason, a personal one. I am probably the only person who knew Orwell but who has not read his *Nineteen Eighty-four*

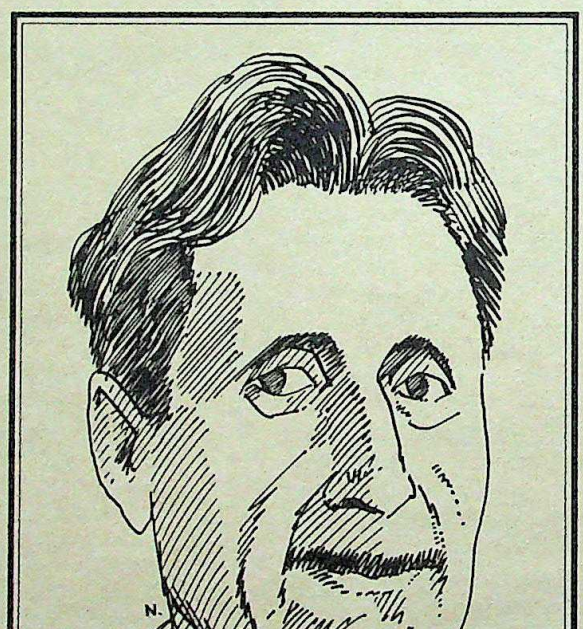
Orwell was born 80 years ago in India, in a place called Motihari which I would have great difficulty in locating on the map and which few of us have visited. He pronounced it as Motiharry and was once amused to be told that it meant a string of pearls. He told me that he had tried once or twice to visit India. This was after he had returned from Spain where he had fought alongside the Republicans but he came down with suspected tuberculosis in the winter of 1938 and went to Morocco instead. He spent only four years in India as a baby, from 1903 to 1907, when his family returned to England for good, though his father continued his service here until 1912 when he too retired and went home.

I first met Orwell in a first-floor dining room of a Chinese restaurant in Soho at a dinner hosted by London Majlis, an organisation of Indian students in London. The do was apparently organised by Rafiq Zakaria and Krishna Menon who was Nehru's man in London and operated out of a small office in Strand. At the dinner, I shared a table with Orwell and a man everyone called Morgan who, I was told later, was none other than the novelist E.M. Forster.

I had heard neither of Forster nor of Orwell, though the latter's book *Animal Farm* had been in bookstalls at least for a year and was a big success. I had, however, been under the impression that it was a children's book or maybe a fairy story for adults. I asked him casually if he was a retired Indian army officer as there were quite a few of those in England those days and that's what he looked like anyway. With his khaki shirt and bushy moustache, Orwell looked like a retired captain in mufti, but there was something about his eyes that gave him away, for they were small round bullets that pierced holes in you, as your eyes met his.

"No," he said, "I was not in your army but I was in your police, but that was long ago. You were not perhaps even born then."

We talked about Gandhi and, of course, Nehru and the Cabinet Mission which had gone or was about to go to India. It was the summer of 1946, a heady summer for most of us and particularly those living outside India, but this man who had been a policeman in India did not think much of the mission. "Your problems will begin when you are free," he said, "just as our problems started after we won the war."



Forster listened in as we talked but did not say much. He would sometimes cup his ears to catch Orwell's words for Orwell spoke softly, almost inaudibly, barely above the buzz surrounding us. I noticed that he was pale, even for an Englishman in summer, and his khaki shirt and yellow tie made him like a wax dummy in Madame Tussaud's.

I should get to know this man better, I said to myself, as we left the restaurant and made our way to the tube station along Shaftesbury Avenue. It was not yet dark and there was time for a nightcap and we went into a pub just behind Regent Street. Orwell's manner changed completely at the bar; he was now an Englishman in a pub, not a 'bloody socialist'—his own words—declaiming on capitalism and democracy and 'fat bankers with their brassy laughs'. He gave me a copy of his *Homage to Catalonia*, his account of the Spanish civil war which he considered his best book, better than even *Animal Farm* which had run into five editions and was being translated into several languages.

Orwell, I found, was more interested in Gandhi than Nehru whom he considered a conventional *New Statesman* socialist. He had not met Nehru, not even in Barcelona where Nehru too had spent some time, and did not seem anxious to do so. He liked Gandhi's ideas about decentralisation—something that was anathema to socialists then—not as an economic theory but as a means of preventing concentration of economic and political power. Orwell was basically a political animal and all his reflexes were essentially political.

"I should like to spend some time with Gandhi and write a book on India," he used to say, though many of us advised him against it for we felt that Gandhi had little in common with the new India that would blossom forth after Independence. We were all socialists then and wanted steel plants and power stations, giant canals and motor car factories, and believed that if Gandhi opposed modernisation, he would have to be firmly pushed aside.

I had no clear idea where Orwell lived; his only London address was the offices of *Tribune*, a weekly paper edited by Aneurin Bevan's wife, Jennie Lee. Orwell lived outside London, probably in Scotland, and wrote a regular column for *Tribune*, and also reviewed books for it. *Tribune* offices were quite conveniently located across the Strand from the London School of Economics, up a long and dark flight of stairs at the end of which there was a cubbyhole of an office. As soon as we went there, Orwell would uncoil himself—he was more than 6 ft tall and so thin that he could have easily passed off as a scarecrow—making his way gingerly through the pile of books heaped on his table. It may not have been his table—there was always another man in the room, probably the literary editor—but Orwell hidden behind his pile of books is how I remember him, though he would drop whatever he was doing as he saw us coming and light his pipe and announce, "Here comes the Indian brigade."

We sat once in a self-service cafe overlooking Trafalgar Square—Lyons, I think—and I asked him, as I did whenever we met, if he was writing anything interesting. His last book *Animal Farm* had come out in

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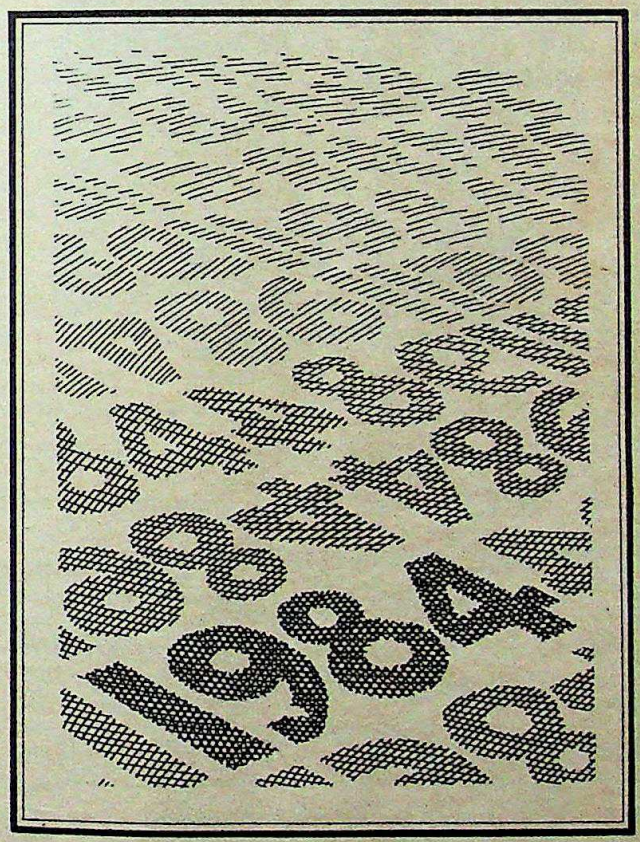
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1945 and he was not a man to lie fallow for so long. He said he had written two chapters of a new book that was something between a novel and a political satire, but he had not liked what he had written and would start all over again soon. He was writing *Nineteen Eighty-four* but that is not what he called it and even after the book came out in 1949, a few months before he died, none of us thought that it would be the book of the century. I do not know what he himself thought of the book, for he was dead within a few months of its publication. I saw him for the last time in 1949—I am not very sure of the month, maybe a couple of weeks before Christmas—as he lay dying in our college hospital, his thin and wasted body propped up on striped pillows and a faint smile on his lips. This is why I have not read his *Nineteen Eighty-four*. Orwell the man is more real to me than his book.

It is a pity Orwell could not visit India. When Nehru was in London in 1948, on his first trip abroad as prime minister, we tried to bring them together but Orwell could not be traced and I got the impression that Nehru was not too anxious to see him. Perhaps nothing would have come out of it. Orwell would have come to India and gone back and written a book, and annoyed, and possibly antagonised, Nehru and the Delhi Establishment. Orwell was both a socialist and a strong anti-communist and that would have certainly upset Nehru as Jayaprakash did. "Nothing has contributed so much to the corruption of the original idea of Socialism as the belief that Russia is a socialist country and every act of its rulers must be excused, if not imitated," he wrote in his preface to the Ukrainian edition of *Animal Farm* which, of course, never reached the Ukraine. Nehru was at home with men like Kingsley Martin and others but would have been uncomfortable with Orwell.

I am uncomfortable with Orwell myself. I often wonder how he would have reacted to things in India and what he would have to say about the enormous changes that have altered its political and economic landscape over the years. Would he have approved of the tremendous power the state has come to acquire since 1950 (when planning began) through the state-controlled apparatus of the vast public sector or would he connect it with corruption and mindless tyranny that exploded into Emergency nine years ago? Would he say that, had we gone the Gandhian way with decentralised planning and village-level democracy, things would have been different and better? One doesn't know, for though Orwell was born in India and spent five years as a policeman in Burma he knew only the imperialist end of the British rule in India. He did come to know India from the other end, though, when he returned to England and went native, and may have come close to understanding it. That was probably one reason why he wanted to visit India after Independence, though I am sure he would have returned an unhappy and disillusioned man.

India's main problem is that we have a highly politicised economy: there is too much of government everywhere. The solutions we seek ultimately lead us also to the political system. This system has become so powerful and all-pervading that it has left no room for other autonomous systems. The economic system has also become an appendage of the political system and Orwell's 'Big



Brother is watching you' has turned out to be too true for comfort.

We talk of growth with justice—the ruling party reiterated this slogan at the Calcutta session last month as if it was a brand new slogan—but we speak solely of distributive justice. Socialism has not solved the problem of productivity. The ethics of justice have shifted decisively from distributive to productive justice. Both are essential but you have to have the latter before you can have the former. More schools, clinics, clothing, food, electric lights, potable water and other goods and services are now needed more than ever before. We have failed precisely because the political system has taken over the economy and failed to deliver the goods.

Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee invited some economists last week to advise him on the current economic situation. The meeting ended as usual with an exchange of clichés, the economists telling him that there was nothing radically wrong with his handling of the economy—as they have been telling all finance ministers from C.D. Deshmukh onwards—and the finance minister asking them to look into some vague and minor problems like subsidies which he is keen to do away with, as all finance ministers do when they do not know where the shoe is pinching them.

This at a time when the economy is almost at a standstill, with industrial production barely above the population increase, prices going up with every week that passes, and the trade deficit higher than ever. Yet the minister says that the picture this year is better than last year with more farm outout and more power, and a higher wagon availability though with a lesser rail traffic. There is a 'but' at the end of every ministerial statement, bumper harvest but higher foodgrain prices, more power but low industrial output, higher exports but no let-up in trade deficit, higher investment but low growth. It is a truly Orwellian situation that calls for a totally new language—a kind of economic newspeak—for communication.

If the public sector cannot generate its own resources and has to be kept alive through forcible feeding, why not do away with it? If higher taxes do not result in higher tax revenues why not try lowering taxes? I wonder if any economist present raised such questions. Almost certainly not, for then they would be questioning the very rationale of our so-called socialist planning. And who wants to be branded as an anti-socialist, even if the socialist measures in vogue result in increasing pauperisation?

In his famous essay, *Inside the Whale*, Orwell wrote: "Progress and reaction have both turned out to be swindles. Seemingly there is nothing left but quietism—robbing reality of its terrors by simply submitting to it. Get inside the whale, or, rather admit that you are inside the whale. Give yourself over to the world-process, stop fighting against it or pretending that you control it; simply accept it, endure it, record it."

Our politicians and economists have been inside the whale for so long they don't know they are inside it. And they may not have even heard of a man called George Orwell.

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ESCORTS

Institutional Pressure

THE CONTROVERSIAL case of Swraj Paul's investments in Escorts and DCM is finally before the courts, with Escorts filing a case in the Bombay High Court in late December. But the more interesting developments so far have been not in the court but outside. For the public sector financial institutions, major shareholders in both Escorts and DCM, have finally started to play their hand.

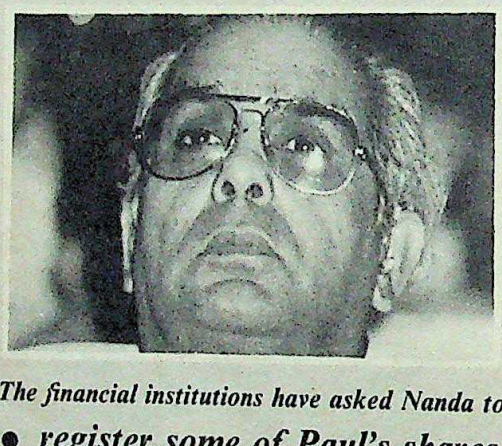
For more than six months, the institutions had sat on the fence and given no indication of taking sides in the bitter and protracted dispute over the registration of Paul's share purchases in the two companies. Not any more. In recent weeks, the institutions have steadily turned the pressure on Escorts to register at least some of Paul's share purchases. Then, in late December, they summoned Escorts Chairman H.P. Nanda to Bombay at zero notice, and at a brief, tense meeting Nanda was told that he would have to take on a fresh institutional nominee on to his board of directors, and do so straightaway—if necessary by asking one of the existing directors to resign.

Nanda was also told that the institutions would not agree to the proposal to merge Escorts with its sister company Goetze, because this would reduce the institutions' combined shareholding in the merged company from 52 per cent now in Escorts to less than a majority holding—around 48 per cent.

Demanding Withdrawal: Other events followed in quick succession. At an Escorts board meeting in early January, one of the institutional nominees on the company's board, D.N. Davar of the Industrial Finance Corporation of India (IFCI) said that Nanda had not cared to inform the institutions in advance of his going to court, and asked him to withdraw the case against the Government, the Reserve Bank, Paul's banker Punjab National Bank, Paul's 13 investing companies and Paul himself.

Simultaneously, the institutions delayed approval on another proposal by the company to issue Rs 35 crore worth of fresh shares and debentures—a move that would reduce the shareholdings of the institutions further, to around 29 per cent. And finally, when Nanda sought to repay ahead of schedule some loans that his company had taken from the institutions—a move that would have freed him from the loan agreement, which gave the institutions powers to place as many as six of their nominees on the Escorts board—the institutions took the extraordinary step of refusing to accept the pre-payment.

Undaunted, Nanda sent the lead financial institution, the Bombay-based Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI), a cheque for Rs 64 lakh. The IDBI decided that only Rs 12 lakh was due straightaway and sent back a cheque for the balance of Rs 52 lakh. Apparently, the institutions wanted to retain their power over Escorts by keeping the loan agreement alive, and made it clear that nothing would move till at least some of Paul's shares were registered.



The financial institutions have asked Nanda to

- *register some of Paul's shares*
- *withdraw his court case*
- *place another institutional nominee on the Escorts board*
- *They have also blocked Nanda's proposals which will reduce their voting power in Escorts.*

Shortly after this show-down, both parties climbed down partly. Perhaps realising the untenability of their position, the institutions agreed to accept the full pre-payment of the Escorts loan (a total of roughly Rs 2 crore), and Nanda climbed down a step by agreeing to take on S. Shanker of the Unit Trust of India (UTI)—one of the institutions—as an alternate director on his company's board straightaway. This was on the understanding that the German director on his board would not attend meetings of the board, so that Shanker could attend in his place. Nanda also assured the institutions that Shanker would be elected as a full director of the company at its next annual general meeting of shareholders, in June.

The institutions were forced to get off the fence and play their hand because of Nanda's determination to take action that would protect his flanks. Throughout the now year-long drama over Paul's share purchases, Nanda's Achilles heel has been the fact that the institutions—effectively under the control of the Government at a time when Paul is known to be an ally of Mrs Gandhi—were the majority shareholders in his company. This meant quite simply that they could at any time convene a special meeting of Escorts shareholders, change the board of directors, and for all practical purposes knock the ground from under Nanda's feet. Paul has in fact repeatedly called for such action. But even without such extraordinary measures, they could have used their voting clout at the next scheduled meeting of shareholders in June (when five of the 15 directorships come up for re-election) and got their candidates elected. In addition to the existing two institutional directors, they would then have had a representation of seven in a board of 15—a finely balanced situation in which Nanda would have to watch his step constantly.

Nanda's package of cleverly conceived measures was partly designed to retrieve this situation. The merger with Goetze and the Rs 35 crore share and debenture issue would both have reduced the institutions' voting power, and the pre-payment of his loan from the institutions would have automatically reduced the existing institutional representation on his board from two to one (since one of the directors on the board, Davar, was there on the strength of the loan agreement).

MEANWHILE, Nanda's own hand was forced in December by reports that the Government was planning to issue an ordinance. This would declare that any non-resident investment in Indian companies cleared by the Reserve Bank would be deemed to have been accepted as genuine investments, and thereby registered in the companies' books. If any company had any complaint on this score, it would be the company (and not the overseas investor) who would have to go in appeal

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to the Company Law Board.

Sensing danger, Nanda quickly moved the Bombay High Court, and with the matter now under legal dispute the Government would have to think twice before issuing an ordinance along the lines that had been proposed. Escorts' case in court is that the Reserve Bank's clarification about the eligibility of Paul's 13 companies to invest in India was violative of the non-resident scheme and the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act, that Paul had bought a part of his 7 per cent holding in Escorts long after the May 2 cut-off date after which no non-resident could invest in and hold more than 5 per cent of a company's share capital, that Paul had not got the Reserve Bank's permission to invest when he made the share purchases, and that a government lawyer had himself said that Paul's companies were not eligible to invest. The Government and the other respondents now have to respond and if the writ is admitted the case could drag on for years—something that will be against Paul's interests, since his Rs 13 crore investment will stay in limbo.

But Nanda's moves, intelligently planned so far, have not been made purely with the Swraj Paul factor in mind. The merger and share issue proposals had other valid reasons, which would normally withstand any scrutiny.

Thus, the merger between Escorts and Goetze was stated to be in the interest of both the companies, and the move had already been approved in principle by the financial institutions—with only the ratio of shares to be exchanged the outstanding issue (a matter on which the institutions have so far withheld support). Then, the Rs 35 crore issue of shares and debentures was needed to finance the company's project to manufacture a new range of two-wheelers plus other expansion projects. Finally, it was in the company's interest to pre-pay the institutions' outstanding loans because this would free Escorts' Rs 70 crore assets, which could then be used as security to sell the fresh lot of shares.

Crucial Juncture: While these were valid reasons, the timing of these moves was equally important. For both the merger and the share issue had to go through before June—when the shareholders are due to meet—so that the institutions' voting power was reduced before that crucial meeting. From this point of view, even if the institutions did not reject Nanda's proposals but merely delayed them long enough, they would be sitting pretty with 52 per cent voting power at the shareholders' meeting. Nevertheless, Nanda hopes to push the Rs 35 crore public issue by April, even though the Goetze merger might now be delayed.

Nobody realised the import of these measures faster than Swraj Paul. At a meeting with hand-picked journalists in December, when the London-based businessman was passing through Delhi, Paul was asked whether the issue of fresh capital by Escorts did not mean that he had virtually lost the battle. His simple answer was "Yes"—if the share issue went through.

Both the merger and the share issue proposals are still pending with the institutions, and repeated efforts by the company to get them hustled through have met with no success. This is a delicate situation for Nanda, the institutions have already shown him how they can deploy their clout in Escorts, and Nanda cannot afford to have them continually ranged against him. After all, they are his biggest shareholders.

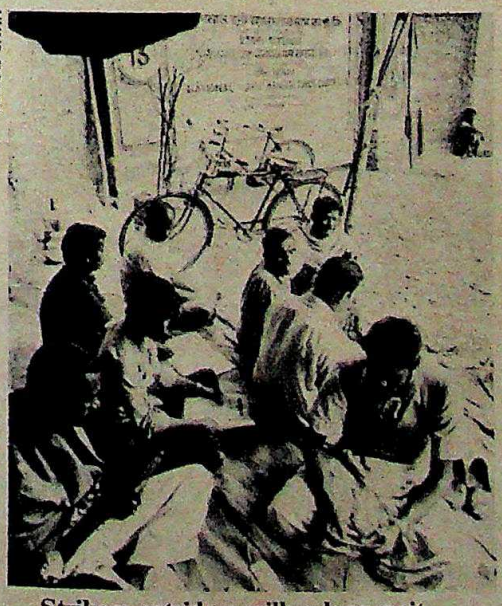
In this delicate play of point-counterpoint, the eventual outcome in the most celebrated corporate battle of recent years still remains anybody's guess. The only comic relief available in the tense situation is from such asides as the fact that Escorts' petition is being heared in the same court room where Balgangadhar Tilak was tried for sedition. During the trial, Tilak had declared: "Swaraj is my birthright."

—T.N. NINAN

JUTE INDUSTRY

Striking Out

TROUBLE had clearly been brewing for some time in the jute industry. Last fortnight, with one of the usual last-minute bids to avert the crisis forthcoming, nearly 2.5 lakh workers began an indefinite strike, paralysing operations in all the jute mills in West Bengal at the height of their business season. Explaining the workers' strategy, Nripen Ghosh, MP and leader of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), says: "By organising a strike at this juncture, we can hit mill owners where it hurts most." And with the unions, including the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) standing firm on their demands, indications are this could well be a repeat of the 50-day strike of 1979, the last to be called in the industry.



PRADIP SAHA

Strikers outside a mill: a long wait

The last agreement between the unions and the managements of the mills, to which the West Bengal Government was also a party, expired in 1981, and negotiations on a fresh pact got bogged down. The main issue is pay: while the Indian Jute Mills Association (IJMA) wants a greater percentage of the pay to be linked to productivity, the workers see this as a ruse to increase the workload without ensuring fair compensation.

As it stands now, only 6 per cent of the Rs 682-wage packet, or Rs 42, is piece-rate. The rest is on a time-rate. Thus even if a worker improves his productivity by 10 per cent, his wages go up only by Rs 4.20 —which is hardly any incentive at all. The IJMA has made it a precondition for wage negotiations that 80 per cent of the pay be piece-rated, which would give increased productivity a real incentive. During the tripartite negotiations before the strike began, the state Government had offered to negotiate at a 28-per cent piece-rate, only to have it rejected outright by the unions.

Conditional Hike: According to K.K. Bajoria, president of IJMA, the mills would be willing to pay more as long as the share of wages in the total cost does not go up. Raw material accounts for 45 per cent of costs, and wages an additional 36 per cent, thus leaving very little room for adjustments or increases. The IJMA argues that since prices of jute have to perforce be low to be competitive, particularly in the export markets where synthetics also jostle for place, the only possible way for the workers to earn more is quite simply by producing more. The workers, on the other hand, fear that in the name of enhanced productivity, contract labour might be encouraged at the cost of the regular work-force.

Already, unions claim, the jute industry now employs only around 1.6 lakh workers against the 2.5 lakh claimed by the mills. According to Ghosh, the gradual introduction over the past four years of pair looms and pair spinning has led to the retrenchment of nearly 40,000 workers. "We are demanding their reinstatement," he says. The IJMA disputes this claim. Says Surya Chatterjee, general secretary, IJMA: "The work-strength continues to remain around the 2.5 lakh figure. With a change in the product mix, lesser number of hands is required. But the drop cannot be more than 5,000 to 10,000."

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Another major point of conflict is the report of a committee appointed after the 1979 strike, which made recommendations on the workload of the workers, and fixed grades and scales of pay for them. While the unions want these recommendations implemented forthwith, the IJMA has rejected the very constitution of the committee, which it says comprises people not technically competent to assess the problems.

Comfortable Position: Workers claim that the "whopping" profit earned by the mill owners is being invested in other industries, and demand that it be ploughed back into the jute industry. Chatterjee denies any such charge saying: "In West Bengal, a whole lot of money has to be invested to ensure captive generation. Isn't this called ploughing back?" Workers also point out that the industry is in fact in a very comfortable position. Profits are high, with 100 bags of B. Twills selling at Rs 700, although they only cost Rs 490 to make. The exports position is also comparatively comfortable and is expected to stabilise at 4 lakh tonnes. The domestic market is expected to absorb around 10 lakh tonnes yearly. This ought to ensure a better deal for the workers, they say.

Meanwhile, a tragic sense of deja vu pervades the settlements of the workers. Sitting idly on their charpoys in places like the dirty and unhygienic Phulbagan Bustee, they contemplate another bout of exploitation by money-lenders—who have been known to charge the out-of-work labourers between 15 and 25 per cent interest per month on loans needed to get through the strike period.



PRADIP SAHA

Nripen Ghosh: taking up the cudgels

While union workers like Mohit Lal Yadav believe there was no way a strike could have been avoided, some men like Jayanta Das of the National Jute Manufacturing, one of the six mills nationalised in the state, are only conscious of the fact that "we are faced with another period of prolonged struggle and hardship". Anger against the Central Government is also evident: the managements of the nationalised mills, they charge, are "toeing the line of the private sector IJMA". Adds Ghosh: "If it could take over 13 mills in Bombay why can't it discipline the jute industry?"

Serious Situation: The strike certainly puts the industry in a serious bind. First, it means a loss of production worth Rs 3 crore daily. Second, stocks are unusually low at the moment with just three weeks' supply left. This in itself ought to earn Indian jute a bad name in foreign markets—particularly because at the recent meeting held in Calcutta between the Indians and the European Economic Community (EEC), the European delegates warned that the failure of exporters to meet the requirement of buyers on a sustained basis would be disastrous for Indian jute. Any ground lost because of the strike will inevitably have to be fought for bitterly against competitors like Bangladesh and Thailand who between them produce 64 per cent of the world's jute. The only consolation for the mills is that the price of raw jute that had risen to unusually high levels this year, will now fall due to the strike.

With both unions and the IJMA unbending on the issue of productivity-linked wage increases, the chances are that the strike might settle in for a long stay. Bajoria does not think so, but gives no reason for his optimism. Unless the uneasy stalemate is broken soon, however, this strike might do the industry more damage than it can easily repair.

—SUMANTA

IJO

High Hopes

FOR THE Third World producers of jute, last month's meeting attended by 23 countries in Dhaka promised to be something of a watershed. After nearly eight years of hard negotiations, the International Jute Organisation (IJO) was provisionally launched. First conceptualised by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) as long ago as 1967, the IJO is aimed primarily at getting the jute producers a better deal in what has so far been a buyers' market.

Jute and jute products were identified at the UNCTAD IV meet held in Nairobi that year as being one of the 18 commodities to be brought under its Integrated Programme of Commodities (IPC). Predictably, this move has been hotly debated by the predominantly rich consumer countries. However, by 1982 an agreement to provisionally constitute the IJO was signed by 19 countries.

Some conditions made then proved thorny at the Dhaka conference as well: they envisaged that the IJO could be formally launched only after buyer-countries which together accounted for 65 per cent of the total world consumption of jute and jute products, and producer-countries accounting for 85 per cent of the total world production had ratified the agreement. Since over 30 buyer-countries, which consume around 40 per cent of the global production of jute, haven't yet signed the agreement, the US and EEC countries raised an objection right at the inaugural session of the IJO which delayed the initial proceedings by several hours.

Laudable Goals: Fortunately, however, another provision in the agreement which stipulates that the IJO can function provisionally for a period of time pending ratification by the remaining consuming and producing countries, allowed the nascent organisation to go ahead with its plans and discussions.

These are certainly of vital importance to the countries that produce jute —India (31.46 per cent of the total global production), Bangladesh (56.67 per cent), Thailand (7.4 per cent), Nepal, Brazil, Peru and China. A lot will depend on how much can be achieved by the IJO in its goals of evolving high-yielding varieties of jute, developing new commercial, industrial and domestic uses, reducing the production cost by modernising its manufacturing process, and promoting and expanding its market in the consuming countries. The troubles that plague the industry are considerable: not only has the market for jute fallen 30 per cent in the last 10 years, prices have also declined by 50 per cent. Jute producers continue to be handicapped by comparatively unremunerative prices for their products, and increasingly stiff competition from the cheaper synthetic substitutes.

But the IJO might find the going rather tough in terms of funding. UNCTAD has suggested a budget of around Rs [illegible] lakh for the current year—not exactly a large sum of money. The only way this constraint can be overcome is if the countries now outside the IJO decide to join it.

For the present, however, the formation of the IJO in itself is reason enough for some cautious optimism in the troubled jute industry in Bangladesh, India and other countries.

—IHSANUL KARIM in Dhaka

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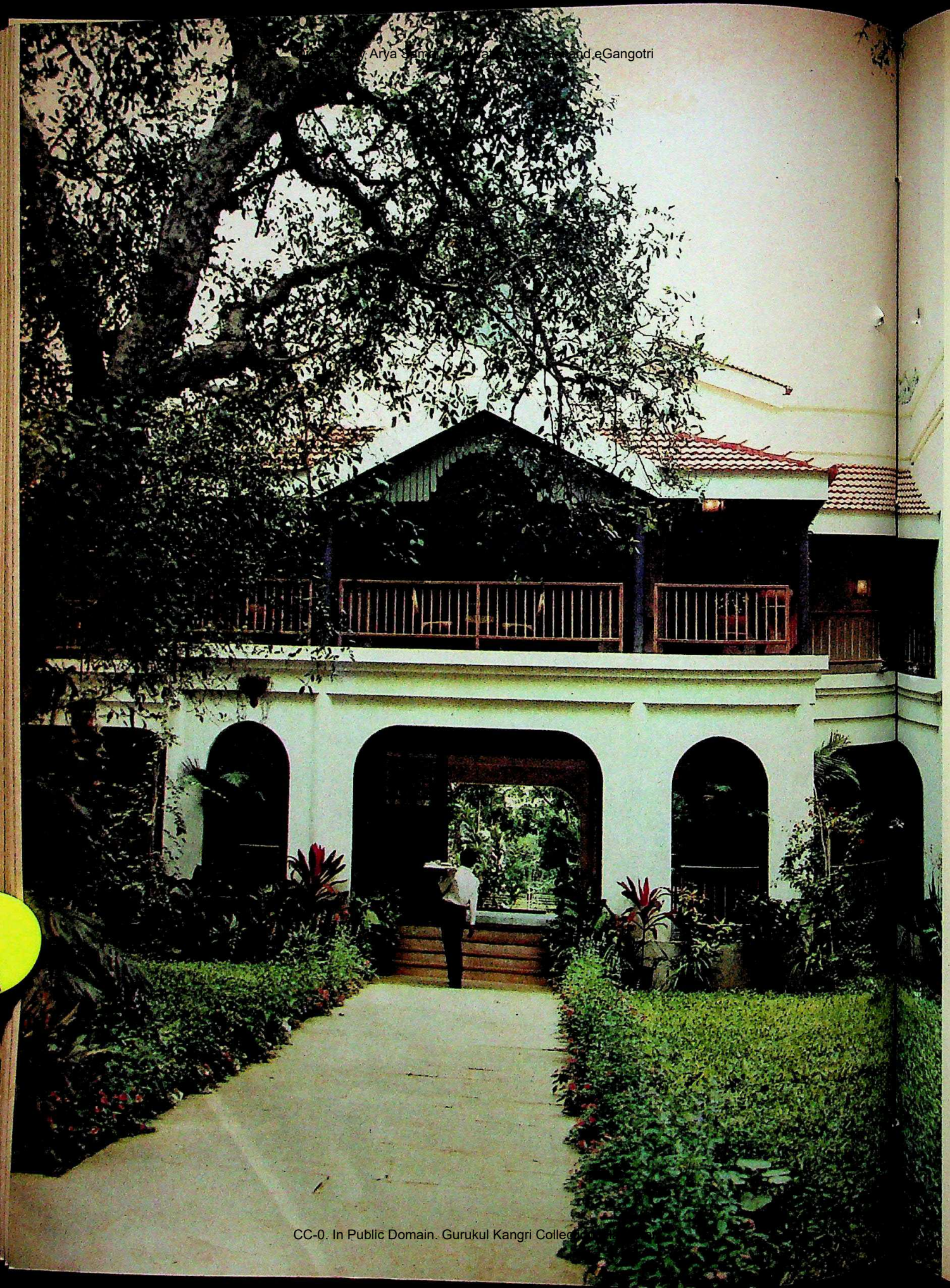
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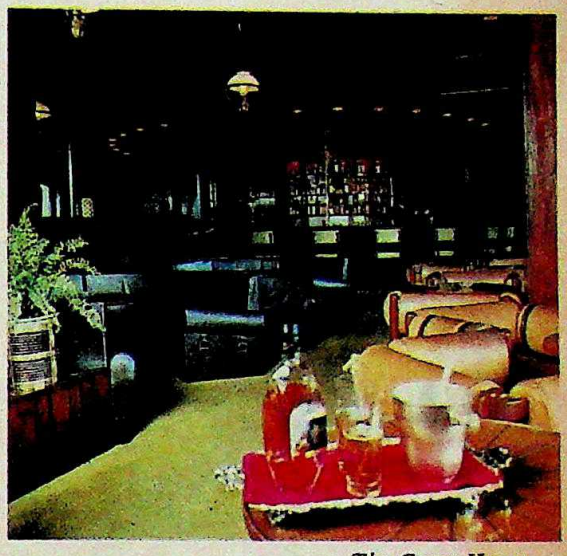
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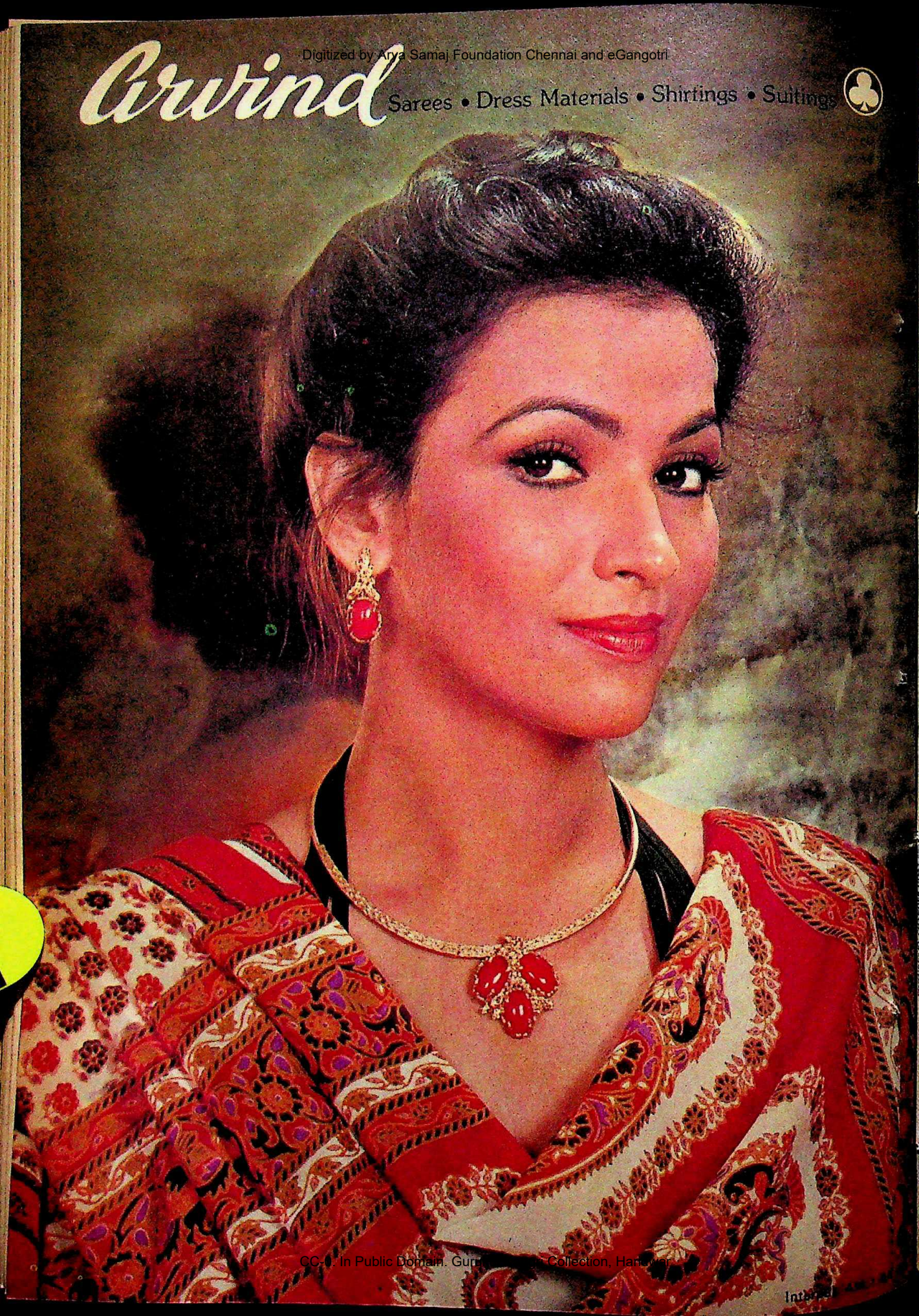
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DIAMONDS

Sparkling Success

IN A SENSE it was like coming full circle for India. For the nation which first discovered diamonds and used the precious stone in its uncut form in royal jewellery, the low-key visit last fortnight of Diamond Trading Company (DTC) head, Sir Philip Oppenheimer, marked a spectacular coming of age. Transformed in less than a decade from a small processing centre to the world's largest diamond cutting and polishing nation, it was only natural that India should attract the man who controls the South African firm, De Beers Consolidated, which has a global monopoly on the diamond market. Said Oppenheimer: "India is extremely important to the world diamond trade today and, as the largest buyers of our rough diamonds, to DTC also."

India has emerged as the leading processor of uncut diamonds—known in the trade as "rough"—overtaking traditional world leaders, Belgium and Israel. Export of over 46 lakh carats of the polished gem in 1982-83, valued at Rs 913 crore, accounted for over a quarter of the world trade in diamonds. (This, however, is different from the country's net foreign exchange earnings on diamonds Rs 300 crore this year since there is a substantial outgo on importing the roughs.) This year's gross exports are projected at Rs 1,200 crore, and should give the country 33 per cent of the global glitter trade. Over 200 million diamonds from India, weighing over 54 lakh carats, will find their way on to engagement rings, watches and jewellery around the world.

Global Growth: In cash terms Belgium's diamond trade is still almost 50 per cent larger than India's, but that is only because the tiny European nation remains the largest diamond marketing centre, buying up huge quantities of rough and polished stones from around the world for re-export to consuming countries. But even here India's mushrooming diamond community has rapidly moved into the lead. Belgium's largest diamond exporter, Jayam, is Indian-owned. Five others in the list of top ten trader-exporters and roughly 40 of the top 80 firms in the exclusive business, are also owned by non-resident Indians.

The trend is gaining momentum elsewhere too. Indian diamond traders have begun to make a dent in New York's Jewish-monopoly 47th Street diamond centre. Last year the largest importer from India was Manhattan-based Paras Diamond Corporation, an Indian-owned company which notched up $33 million in 1982-83. "More than 200 Indian firms in the US, Hong Kong, Japan and Singapore are now starting to dominate those markets," said a leading Bombay exporter, "and Antwerp is only thriving because of Indian traders, since it is only Indian polished diamonds which are in demand. I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that the Indian diamond trade is now leading in most centres."

Within the country too, the diamond industry has grown rapidly to prominence, outstripping many other sectors both in employment generation and export earnings. Today, the country's diamond cutting centres in Surat, Navsari and Bombay employ an estimated 3 lakh workmen in tiny, decentralised cottage-scale units. Working on a piece-rate basis—which earns skilled workmen a daily wage packet ranging from Rs 15 to Rs 50—the tiny diamond sweatshops with their primitive grinding tables have stormed world markets.

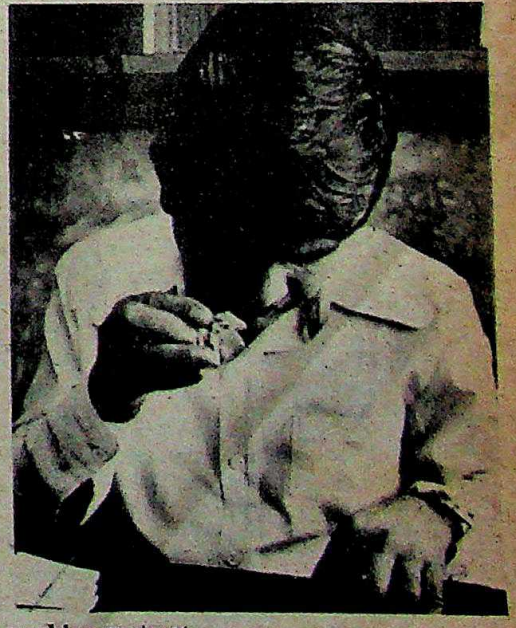
Fresh Markets: With their offerings of bargain diamonds, they have created an entirely new class of working class consumer in developed countries. At a time when markets for the expensive high investment diamonds of Belgium and Israel were collapsing, the market for cheap engagement ring diamonds from India's labour-intensive cottage sector continues to boom.

Their decentralised production makes diamonds unique in the context of Indian export efforts. Relying on neither infrastructural development nor fiscal aid from the Government and growing without any foreign technological help or expensive machinery, diamond exporters and the cottage-scale "factories" have built up a massive world-dominating business in just a little over a decade.

Although virtually all the raw material is imported—India's Panna diamond mines with an annual output of 15,000 carats, supply only 0.5 per cent of the processors' requirements—the net foreign exchange earnings from diamond exports spiralled from less than Rs 10 crore in 1970-71 to Rs 247 crore 12 years later. According to estimates based on the first nine months of the current year, net earnings of roughly Rs 300 crore will make diamonds the fifth largest exchange earner for the country this year. A remarkable performance, considering that the industry only came into its own in the mid-'70s.

Said Shirish Shah, an exporter who is





Craftsmen at work on cutting (left) and sorting the diamonds: working on trust

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Speech of the Chairman, Mr. N. Sudhakar, at the twenty fourth annual general meeting on Friday, the 30th December, 1983.



Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome you all to the twenty fourth annual general meeting of your company. Your presence here in such large numbers, speaks of your interest in the progress of your company and I thank you all for the same.

Performance and Prospects

The Directors' report and the audited accounts for the year ended thirtieth September, 1983, have been in your hands for some time and I shall, with your permission, take them as read.

In the period under review, the sales of commercial vehicles and tractors, which account for the majority of the value of the automobile industry output, suffered a serious setback. The recessionary conditions continued to prevail with the entire spare parts market in the automobile industry remaining very depressed. The resultant drop in the off-take compelled us to lower our production. On the other hand, the cost of power, fuel, wages and raw materials continued to rise steeply during the year. All these factors had an adverse effect on the profits of your company.

Speaking of the future, the action being taken by those already in the Automobile Industry to upgrade technology and install higher production capacities, and the entry of several others in the field, are sure signs of the growth this industry is preparing for in the future. With a turn for the better in the overall economy, there is bound to be a substantial increase in demand, which in turn will have a favourable effect on the growth of your company. In the current year, however, we are viewing this growth with cautious optimism and taking positive measures to cut down our costs and increase overall productivity to counteract the vagaries of the demand fluctuation and its effect on our performance.

The Year of the Silver Jubilee

The Nineteenth of August, 1983, is a landmark in the history of your company, for on this day twenty five years ago, Mr. N. Krishnan founded International Instruments in partnership with VDO Adolf Schindling AG of West Germany. This pioneering action by the father of the Company, supported by the hard and dedicated work of every member of the company, the goodwill of the customer as well as supplier and every individual and institution that was associated with it, elevated it from a position of insignificance to become a trusted name in the field of instruments. Today, your company is the leader in its field, has several precision products in its range and is the largest exporter of instruments. The brand 'Yenkay' has become synonymous with quality instruments and your company is ranked among the top ten instruments manufacturers of the world. On this year of the Silver Jubilee, we once again salute our founder, Mr. N. Krishnan and with the continued support of the Board of Directors and everyone of you, feel confident that we will be able to lead the company through an equally successful period in the future.

The Year of the Automobile

Your company is now entering a very challenging and exciting phase in its life. So many things are happening so fast that it would be worthwhile reviewing what has been the progress since we met here, a year back.

Commercial Vehicles

Existing manufacturers are fast updating their technology and new models are proposed to be launched next year. Japanese truck manufacturers are also likely to enter this field.

Light Commercial Vehicles

Apart from the launching of the 3 tonne Microlorry by Standard Motors and the updating of the vehicle of Bajaj with West German, and Mahindra with French knowhow, the following well known names in the industry have also tied up with Indian companies: these are Nissan, Mitsubishi, Mazda, Daihatsu, Toyota and Suzuki, all of Japan.

Passenger Cars

The Maruti car, in collaboration with Suzuki, has already rolled out on schedule and assembly activity is progressing speedily. Both Premier Automobiles and Hindustan Motors will market their new models with Italian and British designs very soon. Japanese manufacturers are also expected to tie up with these companies as well.

Two wheelers

The most feverish activity is in this field and the greatest progress for implementation of new projects was achieved here.

The Italian connection has been established in the scooters by Piaggio and Gillera with Lohia and Andhra Pradesh Scooters and in the 50 cc bike with Kelvinators; the French have come in through Peugeot with Chamundi Mopeds, the Germans in Zundapp with Enfield India and the British are there in BSA with Karnataka Scooters, which Brooke Bond will manage.

However, the greatest challengers, I believe would again be the Japanese in this field, for they are here for the first time in India. Honda Motor Company with Kinetic Engineering and Majestic Auto are to produce a scooter and Motorcycle respectively. Suzuki Motor Company with Indian Motorcycle Company for Motorcycles. Kawasaki Heavy Industries with Bajaj Auto to make Motorcycles. Yamaha Motor Company with Escorts to make Motorcycles. Escorts have in fact already launched their 350 cc Motorcycle where your company's new technology instruments are in exclusive use.

My objective in providing this information was to focus attention on the new technology being brought into this country and the extent of Japanese participation in it.

Thus, by 1985, you will see several vehicles of the latest technology being available in many models in this country. This revolutionary change will occur for the first time in India and I would call 1985 the 'Year of the Automobile' in our country.

Keeping pace with Technology Changes

Your company will be required to meet the instrument requirements of a much higher technology base for this new family of vehicles, both of the European and the Japanese origin. To cater to the requirements of the vehicles of European origin, as you are aware, we have already signed a fresh collaboration with VDO Adolf Schindling AG, West Germany, the largest manufacturer of instruments in the world.

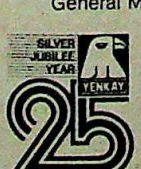
To cater to the vehicles of the Japanese technology, we have now been in discussion for over a year with Japanese instrument makers and I am pleased to inform you that we expect to finalise with them very shortly. With the input of the latest West German and Japanese technology into the Yenkay instruments we will be able to stay ahead of the competition, maintain our lead and fully meet with the requirements of the new technology demands of the vehicle manufacturers. We are thus starting the second phase of our next twenty five years on a very confident and optimistic note.

Acknowledgements

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the Central and State Governments, the Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India Limited, Life Insurance Corporation of India, Unit Trust of India, General Insurance Corporation of India and their subsidiaries, Army Group Insurance Directorate, Canara Bank, Syndicate Bank, Ms VDO Adolf Schindling AG, the various deposit holders and all of you, the Shareholders of the company, for the backing and assistance.

In conclusion, I would like to use this forum to thank each one of our employees for their understanding during their several years with the company and for their valued co-operation and support. I am also grateful to my colleagues on the Board for all the help and guidance that they have rendered to me always.

N.B.: This does not purport to be a record of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.



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vice-chairman of the government-sponsored Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council: "Diamonds represent the ideal kind of export sector which we should encourage. It is decentralised, labour intensive and yields a value added of 35 per cent or more on raw materials, which are not our own—so there is no drain on our natural resources. In addition, it is totally self-supporting, since we seek neither imported machinery nor cash support or infrastructure from the Government."

THE INDIAN diamond industry has come a long way from its tentative beginnings in the early '60s. Started by enterprising Palanpuri Jains from Gujarat, who already dominated the domestic gems trade—when they discovered that rough stones rejected in Belgium could yield small gemstones which cheap Indian labour made viable—it gradually picked up through the '60s. Between 1962—when the first exports were made—and 1970, total exports rose dramatically from Rs 2 crore to over Rs 28 crore and the rise remained steady till 1975 when exports topped Rs 99 crore.

The next three years were spectacular, placing India firmly on the world diamond map and laying the foundations for dominance in the '80s. Made largely from "rough", which was earlier sold for industrial use—De Beers and DTC traditionally concentrated on the upper end of the market with investment diamonds and ignored cheaper stones in their marketing efforts—the flood of cheap Indian exports opened up a massive new market in the West. By 1978—79, gross exports multiplied sevenfold to Rs 693 crore. Net foreign exchange earnings reached a record Rs 222.5 crore and India had arrived on the world diamond scene.

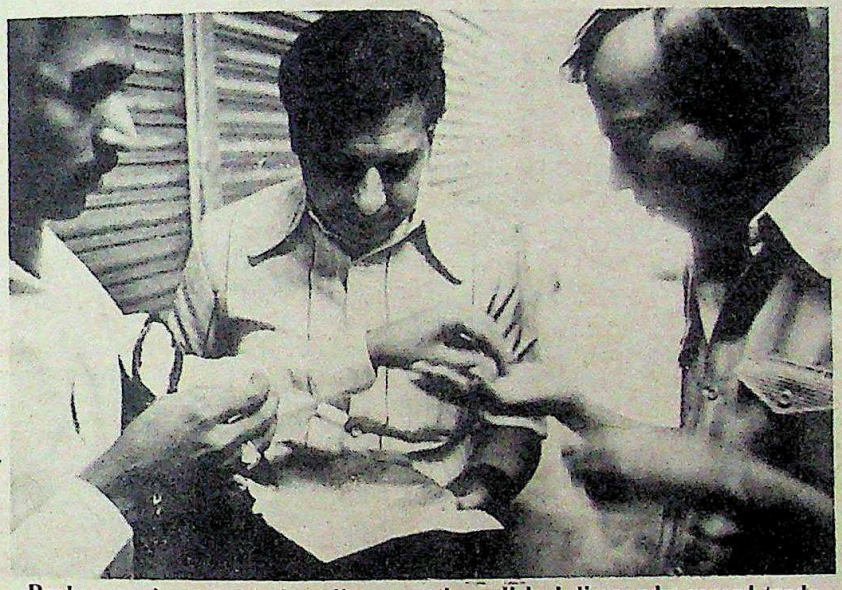
Although the next two years saw a temporary slump in India's diamond exports, the country's extraordinary Palanpuri millionaires were busy consolidating their hold on international markets. Sensing the enormous gains which could be made by controlling both exports from India and the imports into buying centres, the tightly controlled family firms which run the diamond industry had by the mid-'70s begun to despatch family members to set up non-resident companies in Antwerp, New York and other trading centres.

Samir Diamonds, which is generally considered to be India's largest exporting group, is run by the same Mehta family that controls Belgium's largest firm, Jayam, and New York's Paras Diamond Corporation. Belgium's third largest firm, Rosy Blue, is run by the B. Arunkumar group of Bombay, which exports over Rs 35 crore worth of diamonds. Supergems, the fifth largest Belgian company, is run by the Mohanlal Raichand group and Bharat Shah of B. Vijaykumar and Co. has a brother-in-law who runs Vijaydimon, also one of the 10 largest Belgian diamond companies.

The strategy paid off. By 1981, the market for India's small diamonds had picked up once again and exports rose to Rs 727 crore. Despite a world-wide slump in quality gems and investment diamonds after the current economic recession began, exports by Indian processors have continued to rise at upward of 25 per cent annually. Projections for the next few years peg growth at an even faster pace. By 1990, the Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council hopes to push gross exports to an ambitious Rs 4,500 crore.

Despite the massive growth during the last few years, the diamond industry in India remains a little-known, largely disorganised business, run almost entirely on traditional trading lines by small family-managed firms. Tiny cubby-hole offices in four neighbouring buildings in Bombay's Opera House area are home to the multi-crore business which accounts for the country's whopping diamond exports. And in an industry which continues to run largely through unaccounted cash transactions, personal trust remains the only real guarantee against wrongdoing.

In the Panchratna and Prasad Chambers buildings opposite Opera House, a regular stream of brokers and *karigars* moves constantly in and out of exporters' offices. Small leather pouches containing the characteristic paper packets full of polished diamonds are flung onto tables and left to the buying discretion of exporters who are trusted not to "switch" the goods with inferior diamonds. Similarly, large quantities of rough stones are handed over to contract workers for cutting and polishing, and often sold in unrecorded cash transactions. Again, the only guarantee is personal faith. "This is a business in which every stage from mining to the final sale of jewellery can involve theft, switching and other forms of cheating," said one exporter. "One can try to keep a tight control, but ultimately the only fall back is trust."



Brokers and exporters haggling over the polished diamonds: record trade

Tax Raids: However, it was clear last fortnight that the trust within the industry did not extend to revenue officials. There has been a sharp increase in tax raids on diamond dealers and exporters. Officials feel that as nobody but a diamond dealer can value rough diamonds or even passably estimate the size or value of the gem that will be cut from it, there are innumerable opportunities for accounting jugglery.

A number of such practices are common in the Bombay market: a part of the import can be diverted to the booming domestic market which, dealers privately admit, absorbs as much as Rs 200 crore annually. Wastage can be exaggerated in order to deflate profits. Undeclared diamonds can be smuggled out when the unofficial dollar rate exceeds the official rate. And, of course, diamonds for official export can be under-invoiced.

Revenue officials privately admit that they are most worried about the last possibility. Virtually every major diamond exporting family has established a non-resident company abroad and it would be easy to send low priced goods abroad to be sold by the sister concern for a whopping profit.

But, charges of suppressed profits notwithstanding, the industry's achievements cannot be ignored. Added value earned on rough imports has almost always been higher than 35 per cent, well above the Government's minimum stipulation of 30 per cent for export-processing industries. And if present trends continue, Indian diamonds are assured a sparkling future.

—CHANDER UDAY SINGH

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IMF

Relinquishing the Loan

IF THE fourth anniversary of Mrs Gandhi's rule had any lesson, it was in the art of stage-managing the news. The prime minister first went on the air with the glad-handed announcement that the Government would not be asking for the final $1.1 billion instalment of the $5 billion loan negotiated with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1981, which she said over radio and TV was the "result of the careful management of our foreign exchange resources". Mrs Gandhi also announced that wheat would be doled out to people working in various employment programmes at the subsidised price of Rs 1.50 per kg.

The bad news came a day later. Wheat may be available at a subsidised price, but there would be no new jobs in the Government, or even the filling of existing vacancies, for the next nine months—a loss of some 40,000 jobs. Further, spending under the annual plan was to be slashed by Rs 750 crore and non-plan spending by Rs 450 crore in the last two-and-a-half months of the financial year—which would mean a further deprivation of incomes. Numerous new plan projects would be delayed—and the Planning Commission promptly cold-stored major projects, including two giant oil refineries of 6 million tonnes each and a petrochemical complex, while the Daitari steel project is virtually shelved for want of funds. Numerous other projects for expanding operations have similarly been postponed till next year—in all, some 40 projects have been affected.

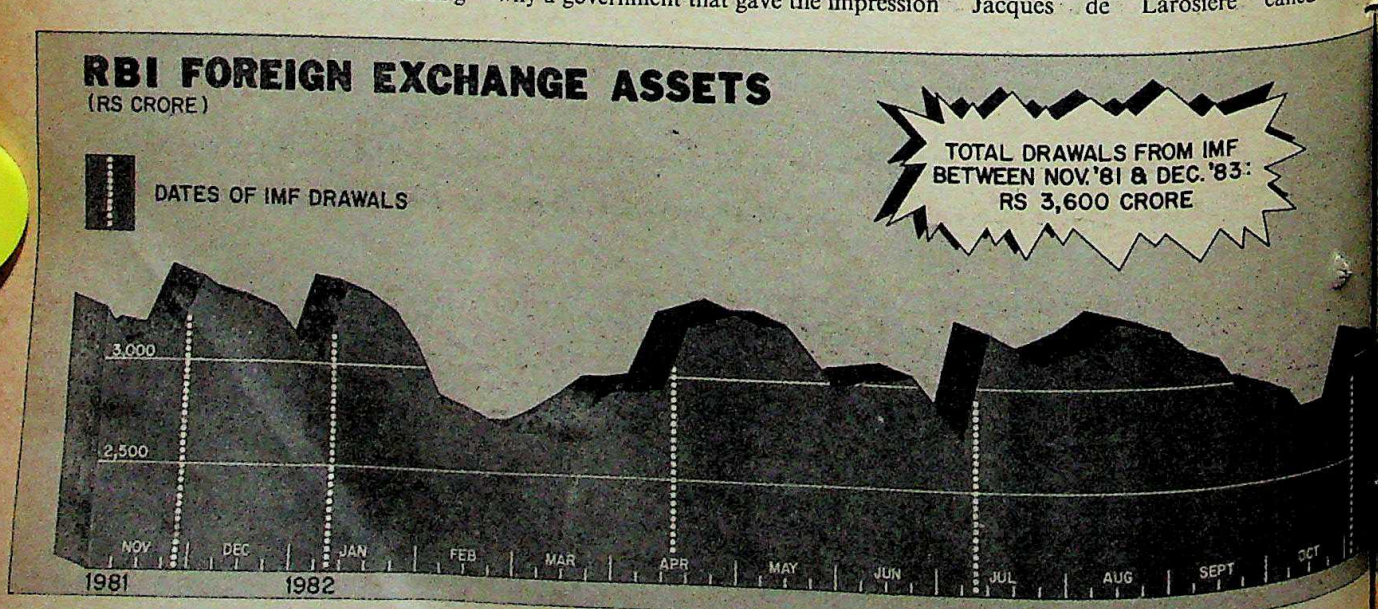
Stern Steps: That was not all. The Government announced that it was coming down hard on public sector units incurring losses, budgetary support to some of these would be delayed, and a detailed review of the units would be undertaken. Towards the end of last fortnight, newspaper reports even indicated that the Government was considering the possibility of closing down some of the units.

Even if this drastic—and unprecedented—step is not taken, bad news was in store for companies like the giant Ranchi-based Heavy Engineering Corporation, which has already used up all its bank credit and, because of the likelihood of losing Rs 40 crore on a turnover of around Rs 150 crore, is likely to need government financial support urgently.

In a trenchant editorial comment on these developments, the *Financial Express* accused the Government of "blaring forth" the good news, and squeaking out the bad and of being "consistently fraudulent in its claims about the progress of the Sixth Plan". The sudden crackdown on government spending—probably without precedent in its severity and timing—suggested a new desire for fiscal discipline that was quite contrary to a series of decisions that the Government had taken in preceding weeks to spend more money instead of less. Two new employment schemes announced on Independence Day last year would cost Rs 300 crore, the announcement of bonus and interim pay relief to government staff a further Rs 280 crore, and new plan schemes (over and above those earlier approved) a fresh Rs 1,283 crore. There was no explanation forthcoming as to why a government that gave the impression all along of having all the money it needed had to suddenly trim its sails in this drastic fashion, although a spokesman of the Economic Advisory Council—formed early last year—disclosed that the council had warned of fiscal difficulties as far back as mid-1983.

Package Measures: On the more positive note, the Government had started taking a series of steps to try and arrest the worrying price rise (13 per cent in retail prices over the year ending November). Tea prices shot up, so exports of specific kinds of tea were banned in order to ease demand. Cotton prices increased, so cotton exports too were stopped. Edible oil prices were proving a problem, so the decision was taken to import large additional quantities of oils. In all states where wheat prices went beyond a cut-off point, the Centre decided to rush in additional Central supplies. And, in last fortnight's package of measures, a special action committee of secretaries was appointed to monitor the supply and prices of essential goods.

But the centre-piece of the Government's package of announcements was the headline-hitting decision to forego $1.1 billion on tap from the IMF. Here was a loan arrangement which almost all the Government's critics had said would land the country in a debt trap, force a devaluation of the rupee, the sharp cutting of subsidies to various sections of the people, and much else. West Bengal's acerbic Finance Minister Ashok Mitra had declared in 1981 that the loan agreement made him feel "humiliated as an Indian". Yet, here was the Government announcing that with almost a full year of the three-year loan programme still left, it did not need the rest of the money. And when Finance Secretary P.K. Kaul flew to Washington the IMF Managing Director Jacques de Larosiere called India's



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move "statesmanlike" and said he was "very pleased".

Yet, did the foreclosing of the loan signify a triumph of sound economic management or a foolhardy gesture that would eventually prove counterproductive? Expert opinion was clearly divided; for though the Government's economists had their sums worked out neatly, others whom the finance minister called in for a pre-budget round of discussions warned the Government of the poor export performance and indirectly advised against going too far with the policy of liberalising imports.

Bimal Jalan, chief economic adviser in the Finance Ministry, argued that the decision to forego the last instalment of the loan was taken on simple logic: "We found that during this year the balance of payments deficit would be less than the money we draw from the IMF. And next year, the position would improve still further because we will import less oil and no foodgrains. The sums we worked out showed that we would not face a liquidity problem for foreign exchange next year. This meant we didn't need the IMF's money." He went on to add that giving up the loan did not mean that "everything is hunky-dory. All it means is that we do not need the money next year. And since there is no point in borrowing for borrowing's sake we told the IMF so."

Asked to comment on the success of the structural adjustment process that the IMF loan was supposed to help achieve, Jalan countered that "structural adjustment in a country like India is never complete", but argued nevertheless that oil production had doubled and power generation capacity been pushed up a hefty 50 per cent over the level of 1980, while domestic production in a number of sectors, like cement and fertiliser, had been increased substantially. Since all these helped the country pare down its import bill or boost domestic production, there had in fact been substantial progress in correcting the balance of payments picture.

All these are valid arguments, but critics last fortnight were also pointing to the other side of the coin. Why was the Government giving up relatively cheap IMF money (bearing an average rate of interest of between 7 and 9 per cent) at a time when it was criticising the move to reduce aid funding by the International Development Association (IDA) and also asking the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for $2 billion, the latter at rates of interest higher than the IMF's? And rather than taking a short-term view of the balance of payments position, should the Government not have taken a longer-term view in judging the issue? After all, the trade deficit remains high at around Rs 5,000 crore, and exports have performed remarkably poorly—the increase so far this year has been at the rate of 7 per cent, against the targeted 15 per cent. If anything has saved the day for the country, it has been the increased remittances by Indians working abroad (attracted by the higher interest rates on deposits offered by the Government since 1982), the spectacular rise in oil production and a consequent reduction of the oil import bill from Rs 5,258 crore in 1980–81 to Rs 3,613 crore this year and a projected Rs 2,500 crore in 1985-86.

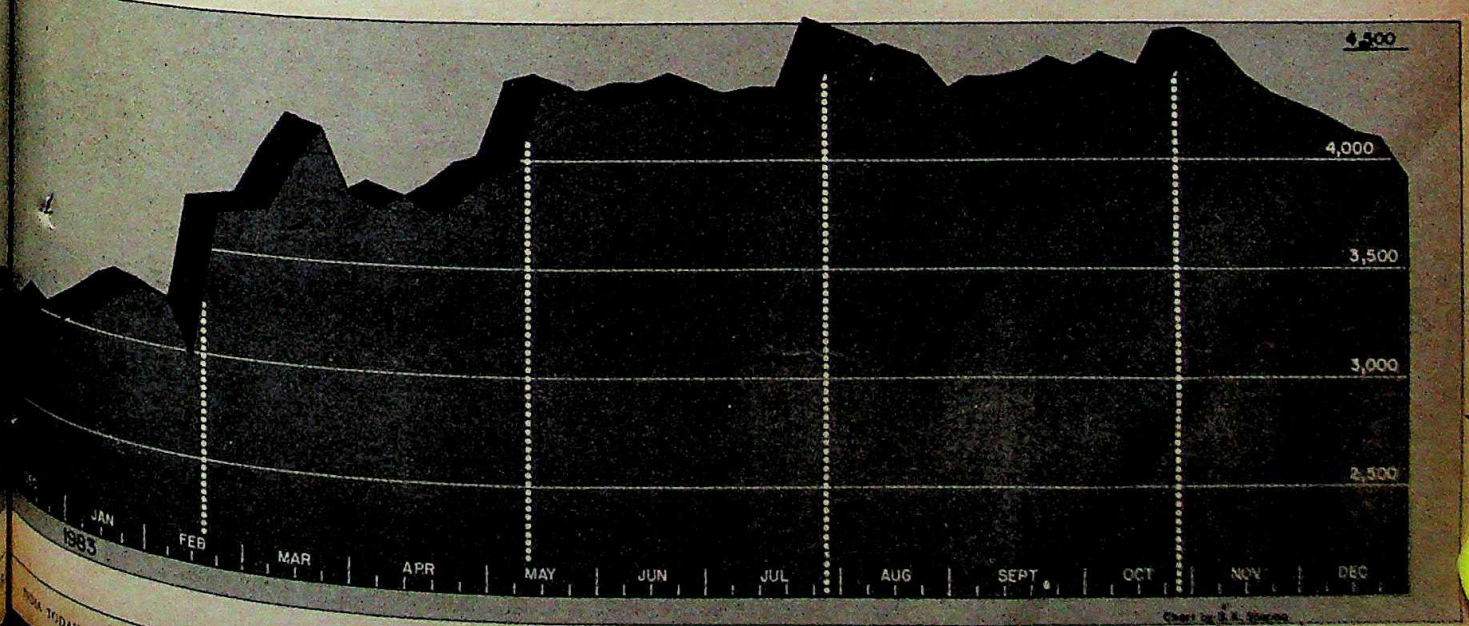
Despite the criticisms, therefore, the central point stands out that contrary to the prophecies of doom, the country was not pitchforked into a crisis by accepting the IMF loan. There has certainly been a price paid —the rupee has been devalued by close to 10 per cent, the rigours of the IMF's credit ceilings forced a sharp credit squeeze and industrial slow-down in 1982, and the IMF's policy biases have brought about an avoidable import spree—but not anywhere near those extracted from other IMF borrowers, many of whom have been convulsed by social upheaval because of IMF loan conditions. Few can dispute that in a difficult situation, the Government has emerged with high marks so far. After all, there is no precedent for any country embarking on an IMF loan of this size (the biggest in the IMF's 40-year history) and then being able to give up a part of the loan.

Worrying Factors: Nevertheless, as Jalan admits, there are difficult tasks ahead. Indian industry is as uncompetitive today as it was three years ago, when the negotiations with the IMF began, the aid climate is decidedly bleak, exports are slack, and the IMF loan repayment (starting from May next year) could well prove a heavy burden. Foreign exchange reserves, as a matter of fact, at slightly under Rs 4,000 crore, are equal to no more than the equivalent of three months' imports—roughly the same cushion as at the time the loan was signed in November 1981.

The immediate problems, however, focus on the fiscal situation and the Government's impecunious position. The coming Central budget could therefore have some unpleasant surprises in store, even as industry is slack (a substandard growth rate so far of 4 per cent) and many of the Sixth Plan's production targets will almost certainly be missed by a wide margin.

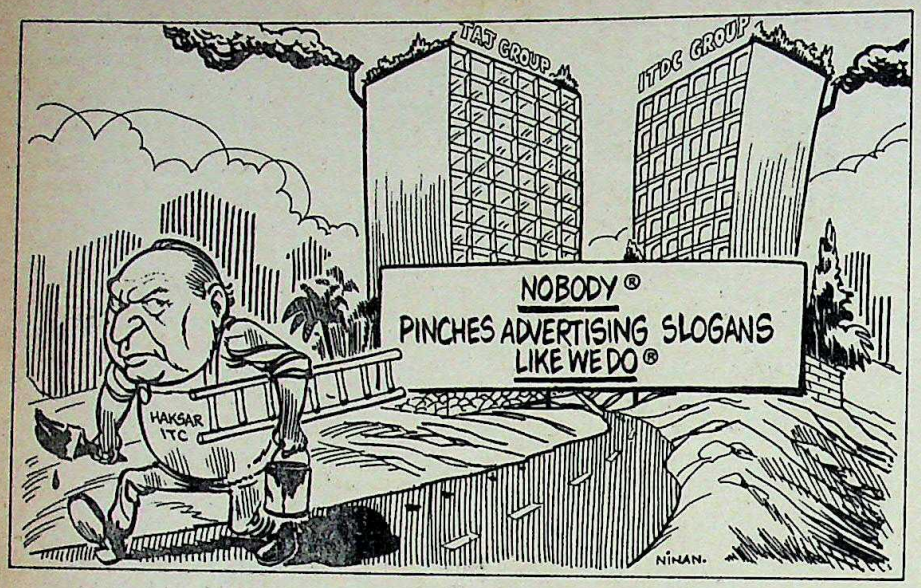
The need for cash has already forced the Government to up coal prices in early January by a hefty 25 per cent, netting Rs 500 crore in a full year. Whether there will be other similar announcements, and whether the budget will be tough or easy, depend essentially on the Government's calculations regarding how to balance the desirable with the necessary in a pre-election year.

—T.N. NINAN



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HOTELS

Copy Writing

"PINCHING somebody's idea for advertisement is both unethical and immoral," says Ajit Haksar, chairman emeritus of ITC, which runs the Welcomgroup chain of hotels. And he isn't saying that to just journalists.

In a letter to J.R.D. Tata, Haksar has accused the Tatas' Taj group of hotels of plagiarising Welcomgroup's slogan "Nobody gives you India like we do." In a second letter by an ITC executive to Rajen Jetley, managing director of the public sector India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC)—which runs the Ashok group of hotels—ITC has pointed out that ITDC has been "pinching" ITC's motto "We enjoy people." Asks Haskar: "Have the other hotel goups run out of ideas or imagination that they have to borrow ideas from us?"

Similar Slogans: ITC's presiding deity is exercised because of a campaign being run by Taj Palace Hotel in Delhi. One advertisement said "Nobody pampers a bride as well as the Taj." Another claimed that "Nobody takes business as seriously as the Taj." Both, Haskar feels, are a take-off on the Welcomgroup's slogan. In his letter to Tata he said: "The Indian Society of Advertisers is concerned about proper behaviour on the part of advertisers to not plagiarise on others' ads.... I can only appeal to you to take such action as is appropriate."

Similarly, ITDC's Akbar Hotel in Delhi ran a campaign for its cofee shop, Madhuban, as "The coffee shop that enjoys people", a clear take-off on ITC's motto "We enjoy people." Haskar also points out that while ITC's Maurya Palace Sheraton in Delhi has a Bukhara restaurant, the Taj Palace recently introduced a "Bukhara platter".

Maurya Palace's Bukhara offers "frontier food", and Haksar complains that ITDC's Ashok Hotel in Delhi recently opened a "Frontier" restaurant. Says Haksar: "To me this is unethical and immoral." In his letter to Tata, he argued that "It would be unfortunate if the basic advertising stance of the Taj group was pinched by others, for eg their slogan 'The finest hotel chain'."

Haksar has got a mixed response to his efforts. ITDC has quickly backed out of a confrontation, and a company spokesman said the Madhuban advertisements were "inadvertent and we are sorry for it. We do not want to pick up lines from others. The Madhuban advertisement went in because of oversight."

Short Response: The Taj group, however, has been less responsive. J.R.D. Tata wrote back to Haksar that he was getting the matter looked into. But the Taj hotels' boss, Ajit Kerkar, said last fortnight: "We have never used their slogans. This is just some misunderstanding on their part." Pressed for further comments, Kerkar insisted: "I believe our sales and marketing department have sorted out the entire matter with them. It was nothing."

Haksar certainly does not seem to think so, but the Taj group could have counter-complaints against Haksar's own hotels. Last year, just when the Taj Palace was getting ready for opening, Maurya Sheraton quickly changed its name to Maurya Palace Sheraton. Quizzed on this, Haksar argues that this was unnecessary, that the change of name did not have the ITC board's approval, and that in any case the hotel's name will be changed back to plain Maurya Sheraton, dropping the 'Palace' from its name. That might be a kingly move, but it is clear that right now ITC does not enjoy other hotel people.

THE MARKETS

Overreacting

HOPE used to be the only four-letter word stockbrokers could react to quickly—some brokers at any rate—but it is now being replaced by another four-letter word, poll. This word has apparently upset all calculations of a cosy little boom in the share market and the bears are charging again. Prices are down by an average of 5 per cent since the New Year, a precipitate fall brought on by reports of a mini-crisis in the economy and further by rumours of a mid-term poll.

First, the poll. Although ruling party circles have denied that they are thinking in terms of a poll, there are rumours that elections are no more than two months away, a month or so after the presentation of the budget. The decision of the Centre to slash government expenditure by about Rs 1,000 crore may be a move to keep inflation at bay, but that is not how the markets interpret it. According to the market grape-vine, the finance minister's estimates about the budget deficit have gone haywire—by as much as 100 per cent—and since heavy taxes are out of question in an election year, there is no other way out except to cut down spending and keep the growing deficit within control.

The likely reason for the slump in the market is neither the coming poll—if a poll is coming—nor the crisis, but the simple fact that the market had over-extended itself and prices had gone way beyond their inner strength. Shares are being quoted at high price-earnings ratio—as high as 600 in many cases—and a reaction was overdue. There is still a great deal of water in the milk and levels should come down further, maybe by another 5 per cent or so by budget time.

Popular Debentures: It is also possible that a great deal of loose cash is being mopped up through debenture issues which, for some reason, have proved quite attractive. Even non-convertible issues are quite popular and there are indications that something like Rs 250 crore will be raised in the current quarter. Companies like Century, Enka, Premier Automobiles, Ceat Tyres and J.K. Synthetics are also in the race, along with a number of Tata companies including Tata Steel which is expected to come out with a non-convertible issue of Rs 50 crore. Century Spinning (Rs 20 crore), India Hotels (Rs 12 crore) and Bajaj Auto (Rs 2 crore) are also in the queue. The Bajaj debenture will carry a lower rate of interest of 13.5 per cent but the subscribers will be entitled to allotment of scooters on a priority basis.

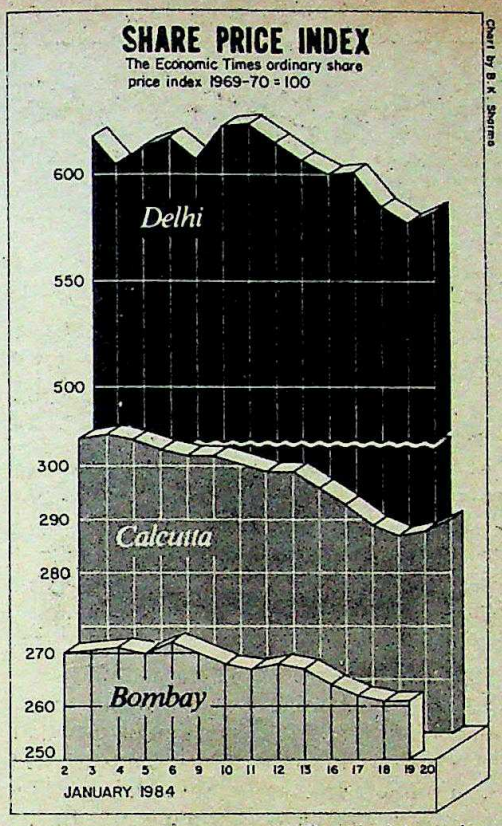
The markets have come a long way in four years since 1980 when the present Go-

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ACTIVE STOCKS

	High 1983	Low	Close 19.1.84	Change on Fortnight
Alembic Chemicals	147.50	120.00	126.25	5.00
Ashok Leyland	37.65	29.50	35.00	(1.00)
Asian Paints	46.00	29.00	43.00	(3.00)
Associated Cement	461.50	325.00	355.00	(15.50)
Atlas Copco	36.50	25.00	39.00	(3.50)
Bajaj Auto	1,800.00	900.00	1,580.00	(40.00)
Ballarpur	48.00	37.40	47.75	(1.65)
Baroda Rayon	312.00	210.00	248.00	(8.00)
Bata India	33.50	18.05	33.30	(0.80)
Beyer	310.00	215.00	300.00	12.00
Birla Jute	62.20	46.10	55.10	(3.10)
Blow Plast	74.50	38.00	43.25	(1.75)
Bombay Dyeing	96.00	57.50	66.00	(4.00)
Boots	57.00	29.50	48.50	(7.50)
Brooke Bond	37.20	26.00	34.70	(1.10)
Ceat Tyres	285.00	195.00	280.00	5.00
Century Spinning	890.00	695.00	825.00	(40.00)
Chloride India	67.65	45.00	46.75	(2.25)
Coates of India	27.87	21.50	27.87	(0.38)
Colgate	101.00	84.00	107.50	2.50
Cynamid	33.00	23.00	31.00	(5.00)
DCM	105.50	32.31	70.62	(5.00)
Duncan Agro	248.00	135.00	218.00	(9.00)
Dunlop	28.40	20.00	26.10	(1.00)
East India Hotels	33.50	20.00	29.12	(1.38)
Elecon Engineering	38.00	29.00	41.00	(2.00)
Escorts	83.00	39.75	70.50	(2.50)
Food Specialities	91.50	50.50	80.00	9.00
Gaco	31.50	20.00	25.00	0.50
Guest Keen Williams	23.00	18.00	21.90	0.20
Gujarat State Fertilisers	588.00	423.00	554.00	(20.00)
Gwalior Rayon	55.75	44.00	55.00	(2.00)
Hindustan Aluminium	48.00	32.10	47.75	(2.30)
Hindustan Lever	71.50	48.58	49.00	(9.50)
Hindustan Motors	39.30	26.40	41.10	(0.62)
Indian Aluminium	25.25	16.25	22.84	(1.96)
Indian Explosives	28.00	22.00	26.20	(1.30)
Indian Organic	35.00	25.50	31.50	(1.00)
Indian Rayon	86.00	62.50	68.00	(3.00)
ITC	44.85	31.50	30.60	(1.40)
Jaysree Tea	44.35	20.35	43.50	(1.00)
J.K. Synthetics	57.50	32.00	44.30	(1.80)
Kelvinator	93.00	70.00	94.00	nil
Keserun	68.10	55.80	58.40	(2.90)
Kinetic Engineering	163.00	68.00	130.00	(2.00)
Kirloskar Oil	28.25	13.25	31.50	(1.75)
Kothari (Madras)	29.00	16.25	25.25	(0.50)
Larsen & Toubro	79.00	52.00	73.75	(5.25)
Lipton	31.80	14.00	25.50	(2.25)
Lokia Machines	90.00	40.00	79.50	(5.50)
Madura Coats	23.40	15.30	23.75	0.10
Mahindra & Mahindra	66.00	42.00	54.00	(2.50)
Modi Rubber	35.37	22.69	26.00	(1.75)
Motor Industries	292.50	220.00	238.75	(13.75)
Mysore Cement	62.50	36.00	46.00	(10.00)
National Organic	207.50	156.25	195.00	(2.50)
Orient Paper	51.90	40.20	49.30	(2.30)
Premier Auto	276.00	229.00	259.00	(4.50)
Raasuxy	50.00	36.00	50.25	(2.75)
Raymond Woollen	65.00	36.50	64.00	(5.50)
Reliance	183.00	100.00	116.00	(7.50)
Remington Rand	40.75	19.00	34.94	(2.56)
Shaw Wallace	48.75	22.20	46.10	(0.90)
Shriram Fibres	41.50	21.75	33.37	0.12
SPIC	30.81	15.25	28.62	(3.38)
Sterw Products	54.10	38.30	50.70	(2.60)
Tata Chemicals	67.00	49.50	56.75	(1.25)
Tata Steel	322.50	234.50	252.00	(11.00)
Tatco	455.00	390.00	397.00	2.00
Tata Investments	59.00	38.00	54.30	(3.80)
Union Carbide	20.50	16.00	21.75	0.25
Usha Martin Black	27.70	21.50	25.60	(1.90)
Voltas	26.50	22.00	21.40	(0.35)
Zuari Agro	405.00	262.00	335.00	(10.00)
Unit Trust	40.50	22.50	38.30	(1.20)
	14.10	12.25	13.65	nil



vernment took over at the Centre. Most shares, though not all, have done well. and some have done very badly. Guest Keen Williams, Indian Aluminium, J.K. Synthetics are more or less where they were four years ago though all of them have come out with bonus issues. Shares which have done remarkably well without much support from the non-residents include Larsen & Toubro, Hindustan Lever, Kirloskar Oil, Indian Rayon, Brooke Bond, Ashok Leyland and, of course, Lipton. In four years from now, will they also head the list of high-flyers? Most probably yes, for these are well managed companies which have diversified substantially from their traditional lines of business, always a good sign. Companies that have not diversified and have stuck to their old lines have lagged behind and will continue to do so. The industrial scene in India is changing so rapidly that you have to paddle furiously merely to be where you are. Often there are so many newcomers that you have great difficulty in keeping your place.

If the announcement of a cut of no more than Rs 1,000 crore—less than 3 per cent of the total government expenditure of over Rs 35,000 crore—can create such a big flutter in the market, things must be really in a bad way. Perhaps the marketeers have over-reacted as they always do when they are forced to face a situation they did not bargain for. There is no doubt that the economy is going through a bad patch—whoever expected prices to rise so much after a bumper harvest?—but such things come and go, and where would the markets be if they didn't?

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

Country	Unit & Currency	TT Selling Rates (Rs)	TT Buying Rates (Rs)
Australia	1 As $	9.7669	9.6553
Austria	100 As Sch.	55.0984	54.5299
Bahrain	1 Dinar	27.3471	27.6537
Bangladesh	100 Taka	42.3524	42.0582
Canada	1 Can. $	8.6794	8.5866
Denmark	1 D. Kr.	1.0704	1.0545
Egypt	1 Egp. £	12.6376	12.5456
France	1 Fr Frc	1.2664	1.2524
Hong Kong	1 Hk	1.3887	1.3745
Indonesia	100 Rupiah	1.8512	1.3745
Iran	100 Rial	12.0099	11.9265
Italy	100 It Lira	0.6400	0.6306
Japan	100 Jap Yen	4.6321	4.5859
Kenya	1 K. shilling	0.7652	0.7599
Kuwait	1 Dinar	35.7964	35.5477
Malaysia	1 Ml $	4.6298	4.5796
Mauritius	1 Rupee	0.8368	0.8310
Nepal	1 Rupee	0.7029	0.6980
Netherlands	1 D Glds	3.4458	3.4094
Pakistan	1 Rupee	0.7919	0.7864
Singapore	1 Sing. $	5.0867	5.6314
Spain	100 Sp Pt	6.7600	6.6940
Sri Lanka	1 Rupee	0.4271	0.4241
Sweden	1 Sw Kr	1.3324	1.3095
Switzerland	1 Sw Frc	4.8694	4.8184
Tanzania	1 T. Sch	0.8532	0.8473
Thailand	100 Baht	46.0000	45.1307
UK	1 Pound	15.3339	15.1975
USA	1 US $	10.8350	10.7050
UAE	1 Dihram	2.8544	2.8345
USSR	1 Rouble	13.4911	13.3974
W. Germany	1 DM	3.8751	3.8353

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Ltd, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 20th January '84.

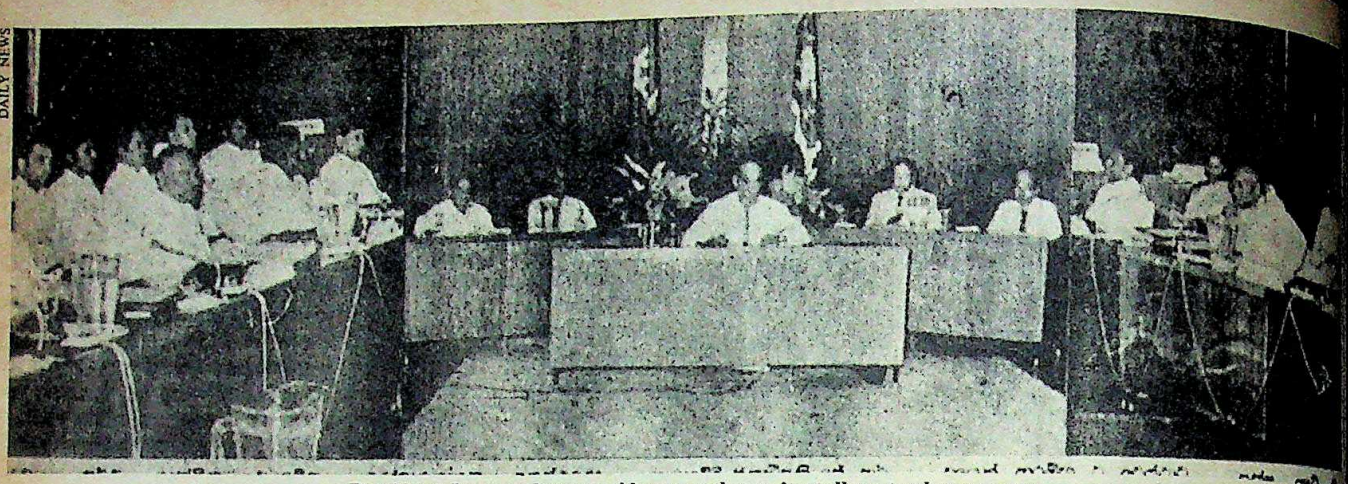
ECONOMIC TRENDS

	Latest	Change on month
PRICES		
ET Commodity Price Index*		
January 19, 1984	284.8	3.2
Cereals	260.6	8.1
Chemicals	324.3	(14.9)
Industrial Fibres	192.1	1.5
Metals	374.7	1.1
Sugar	198.2	(3.2)
Textile Yarn	222.7	(0.1)
Vegetable Oils	372.3	12.1
Gold, standard, January 19, 1984 (Rs per 10 gm)	1,900.00	55.00
Silver, .999, January 19, 1984 (Rs per kg)	3,470.00	(60.00)
SHARES		
ET Share Price Index* January 19, 1984	273.6	(11.5)
Cement	233.4	(19.1)
Chemicals	215.8	(7.9)
Engineering	494.2	(13.4)
Fertilisers	244.1	(6.7)
Man-made Fibres	403.7	(21.8)
Paper	544.9	(17.8)
Rubber Goods	193.2	(23.7)
MONEY		per cent
Money Supply, December 23, 1983		1.3
Bank Deposits		1.5
Foreign Exchange Assets		(20.5)

* 1969–70 = 100

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President Jayewardene presides over the amity talks: steady progress

SRI LANKA

Parleys of Peace

SLOW and steady wins the race. That seems to be the way things are turning out for Sri Lanka President Junius Richard Jayewardene. The fortnight-long all-party amity talks to bring racial peace to the island republic concluded in Colombo last week. On the whole, the occasional outbursts of Sinhalese and Tamil participants notwithstanding, the talks achieved a measure of success.

Three committees have been set up to continue the work initiated at the conference, called by Jayewardene in a serious bid to find a solution to his nation's Tamil problem in the wake of the bloody riots of last July. One committee will look into the grievances of all the communities. The second one will examine decentralisation of authority at the district level while the third one will look into all aspects of the recent racial violence. Parties that took part in last fortnight's talks will nominate one member to each of these committees, which are expected to submit their reports in a month.

"So Parliament has come to the Bandaranaike Hall," remarked a political columnist on the day 17 delegations attended what is being styled "The Amity Summit" in Colombo. Responding to that rhetorical observation, an opposition MP observed: "No, this is like a Constituent Assembly." Only, it came 40 years too late.

Unwieldy Congregation: In the conference room were representatives, three each, from all the recognised political parties, except three: the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the neo-Trotskyist Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP). Following demands by the MEP, Jayewardene invited several religious and social organisations, like the supreme council of the Maha Sangha Sabha (the ranking Buddhist prelates), the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress, the Sinhala Association, the Council of Muslim Elders, the Christian Bishops and a Hindu organisation.

As Jayewardene feared, the conference became unwieldy. But, in order to produce a nationally acceptable solution to the ethnic problem, this seemed inevitable. The President, having faced criticism for being slow and indecisive, promptly swung into action to ensure that the conference did its best to come up with results. Before it began, he warned his party colleagues not to say anything that could jeopardise the talks and advised the press to refrain from publishing unhelpful stories.

To everyone's surprise, the talks ended amicably. In his only public comment on the talks, Jayewardene described the proceedings as "an exhilarating experience" which demonstrated how civilised people conduct their affairs. He added that delegates spoke without fear or favour and, significantly, spoke about the need to ensure devolution of state authority to make decentralisation effective.

The fact that the hawks in the ruling United National Party (UNP) kept quiet during the talks and that the press did not write anything nasty proves that people who matter in the country are convinced that their President means business this time.

Leaders of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) are understandably disappointed about the time-consuming process the negotiations got themselves converted into. Considering that such a serious effort is being made to solve the nation's Tamil problem for the first time since Independence, the moderate Tamils are willing to wait and see what results Jayewardene's efforts will produce. "The President's attitude is optimistic," said a TULF leader. "He's looking at the talks positively and constructively. He's pursuing the problem with a certain dogged determination. We hope something will come out of the talks."

Crucial Talks: Jayewardene has chaired all the sessions himself. His Government's delegation was led by Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), after initial reluctance, took part in the talks. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, having been deprived of civic rights, kept away. But her son Anura attended the talks as leader of the Opposition in Parliament. The TULF was represented by Secretary-General Appapillai Amirthalingam, party President Sivasithamparam and former MP Sampanthan.

The talks, which were occasionally acrimonious, were mostly on broader issues. Several delegations expressed their misgivings at the formal talks "primarily to get things off their chest" as one observer noted.

The Buddhist clergy's uncompromising position has unsettled quite a few of the island's 3 million Tamils of Sri Lankan and Indian origin. Said one of them: "What is important is that all the major actors in the play are taking part. This is a hopeful sign. Once the committees get down to serious business, it will be known which way the country is heading."

There is much at stake at what is happening in Colombo for the future of South Asia. If these efforts fail, nothing may succeed; the results could be disastrous for the prettiest island state in the Indian Ocean and its 15 million people. Which is why success is of paramount importance.

—S.VENKAT NARAYAN with MERVYN DE SILVA in Colombo

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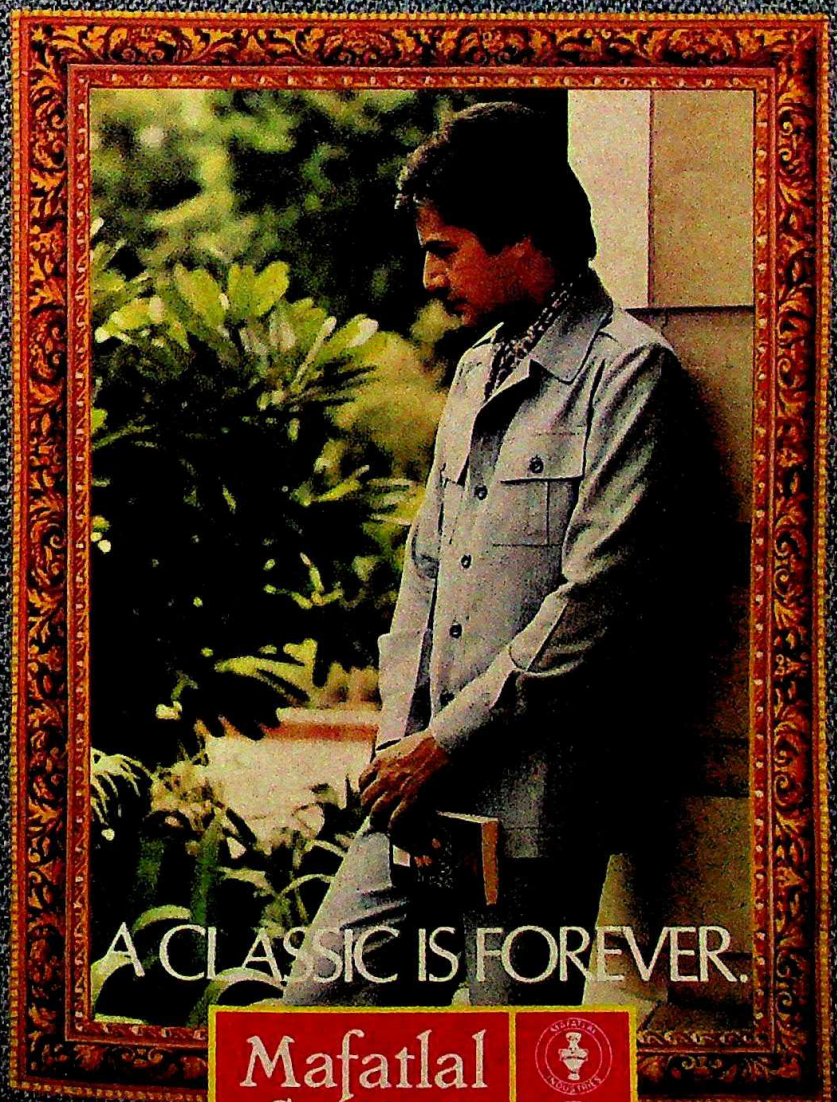


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L. SUBRAMANIAM

Western Fortissimo

THE REVIEWER of the *San Francisco Chronicle* hailed him "as the greatest of the Indian violinists... both Paganini and poet". A Norwegian critic referred to him as an "eastern Yehudi Menuhin" West Germany's *Berliner Morgenpost* rated him as "one of the 10 best violin virtuosos on the international scene" whilst a Swedish jazz critic acclaimed him as a "phenomenon and a perfect virtuoso on his instrument, and a master of improvisation on par with Ravi Shankar and John Coltrane". France's *Liberation* described him as a "young genius... elegant and magnetic". Joining in this resounding, fulsome shower of approbation to a 35-year-old Indian doctor-turned-violinist, Lakshminarayana Subramaniam, were the music critics from the *New York Times* and *Le Monde*, *Downbeat* magazine and *Village Voice*.

Despite this fuss and clamour, "Dr L. Subramaniam" has remained relatively unknown in his country with perhaps the exception of Madras, where he was once apparently conferred with the title "Violin Chakravarti" by the governor. Relaxing at a small Parisian café, Mani, as his friends call him, smiles ruefully: "Perhaps I ought to get an efficient press agent in India."



Subramaniam: blending east and west

Musical Genius: Diminutive, curly-haired and placid-mannered, Subramaniam looks like the sort who would be more comfortable performing before the austere, conservative audience metronomically keeping time at the Thyagaraja Festival in Madras rather than jamming with jazz superstars like Maynard Ferguson and Herbie Hancock. But his trail-blazing forays with these titans of jazz and others like George Duke, Tom Scott and Hubert Laws into East-West musical coalescence have been acclaimed as "path breaking" and exordiums to "future musical innovation". He says: "I have become involved in different musical genres. So I don't like the expression 'jazz rock' applied to what I do. I prefer to use the term neo-fusion."

Born in a family of gifted musicians, his parents, Lakshminarayana and Seethalakshmi, encouraged their three boys to become accomplished violinists. The three, including the eldest, L. Vaidyanathan and the youngest, L. Shankar, became familiar in Madras musical circles as the "violin trio". Vaidyanathan now plays and writes film scores in Madras whilst Shankar has earned laurels at jazz festivals abroad by becoming a key member of John McLaughlin's band "Shakti" and now lives in England.

Subramaniam graduated from the Madras Medical College in 1971 but never practised medicine. A scholarship at the California Institute of the Arts in 1973 to study western classical music and to teach Carnatic music saw him establish his home base there. Since then Subramaniam has performed around the world with barely a pause. In his 35 albums to date, he collaborated with an extraordinary range of top calibre Indian artistes such as Ali Akbar Khan, T.R. Mahalingam, Semangudi and Alathur Srinivasa Iyer, Alla Rakha and the legendary Palghat Mani Iyer.

Fusing Traditions: He dipped his bow into fusion waters as a result of a concert tour which Ravi Shankar opened for ex-Beatle George Harrison. Recalls Subramaniam: "George became interested in me and produced a classical album but that was when he was involved with Apple Records and went through a lot of changes, so this record never came out." However, the next few years produced a series of alliances. After Larry Coryell the guitarist and Stu Goldberg, the keyboard player, invited him to compose for them, Subramaniam found himself on the cover of an album in Germany.

During a visit to Denmark, where he had several rivettingly successful tours, the celebrated Danish jazz violinist Svend Asmussen attended one of Mani's concerts and was reportedly entranced. The mutual admiration led to the collaborative album *Garland* taped in 1978 but recently released in the US. Watching a joint performance of Asmussen and Subramaniam, a critic of Copenhagen's *Berlingske Tidende* wrote: "In spite of his skills, Asmussen is unable to play classical Indian music but to Subramaniam the rhythmic western music is sheer child's play. His technique is unsurpassed and his identification with his own music is fantastic."

Close on its heels came an album which blended Indian concepts and contemporary jazz. The result was *Fantasy Without Limits* with pianist Milcho Leviev, saxophonist Frank Morgan and vibraphonist Emil Richards, among others accompanying Subramaniam. With its visceral polyrhythms and complex metres, the album justified its title and pleased Subramaniam who says: "This was my first real neo-fusion venture." Word of this unconventional talent reached Crusader Records who were on the look-out for a new artiste.

Excellent Ratings: The resultant album, *Blossom* found Subramaniam reunited not only with Goldberg, Coryell, Richards and saxophonist John Handy (familiar to Jazz Yatra fans in Bombay) but also on a few tracks supported on the piano by Herbie Hancock (Hancock's newest composition *Rockit* is currently leaping up hit-parade charts world wide). *Blossom* was one of several Crusaders-related ventures. It won the Swing Journal award in Japan and was rated one of the 10 best LP's of the year by the *Los Angeles Times*. Subramaniam's last album *Spanish Wave* has been listed as "probably the best East-West LPs" by the critic of the *New York Times*. Meanwhile in Paris, he also recorded a double album for the Radio France collection.

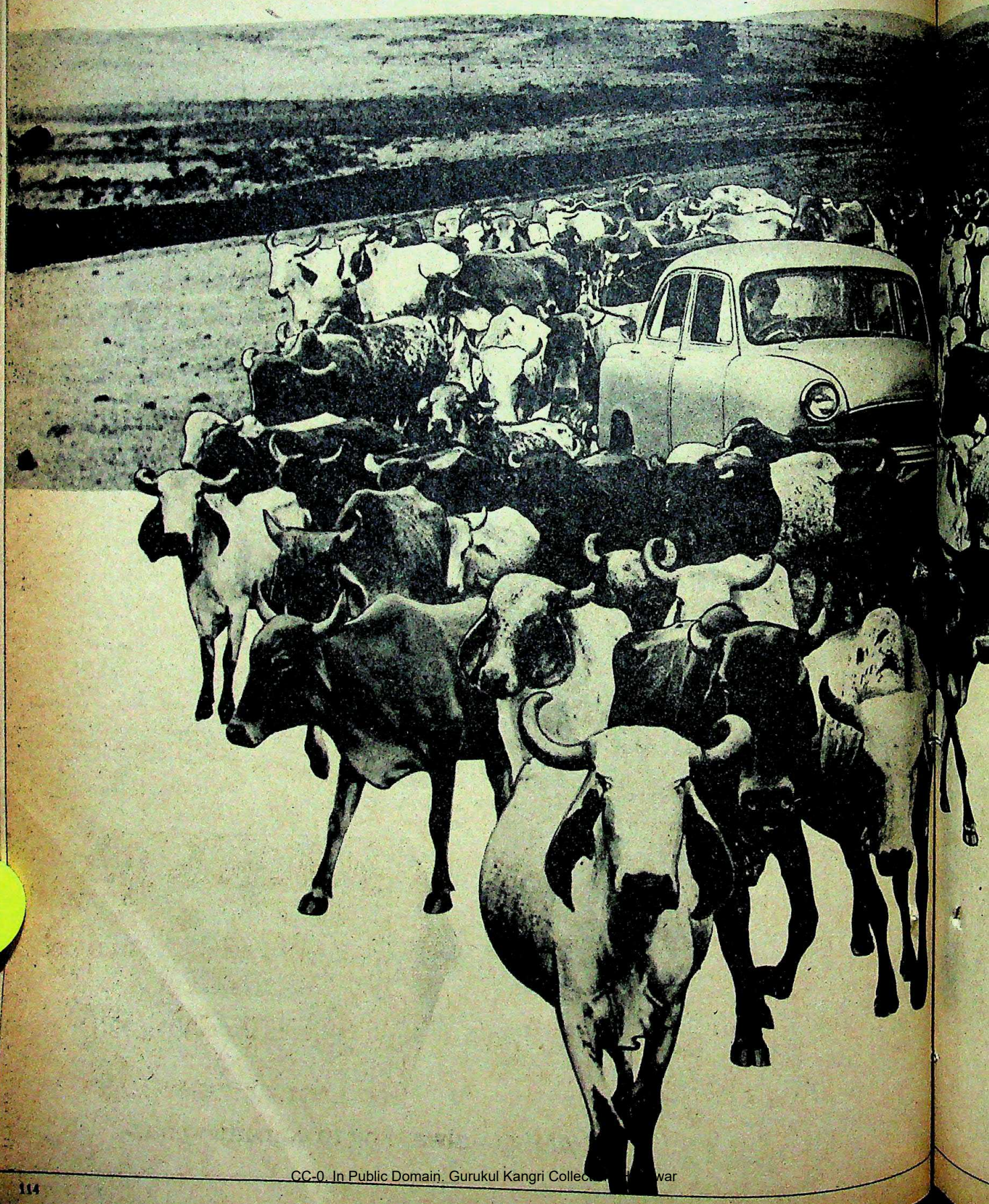
Subramaniam has often been asked how he goes about achieving this East-West collusion. As he explains: "I try to reach a point where, instead of pulling them (western musicians) totally to my side, or moving over to theirs, I reach a compatible middle ground. We also take other elements—western, classical, romantic touches; and in addition to writing harmony along western lines, I write some pieces in a certain mode, in which case I will simply say, 'play anything you like on a D 7th' or whatever it may be. Perhaps this is why I have been compared so often to John Coltrane whose interest in Indian music produced results that were achieved in a similar manner."

According to him, 1984 will be his busiest year ever. He is scheduled to introduce his "Double Concerto for Violin, Flute & Orchestra" at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, Los Angeles, with the New American Orchestra accompanied by the flautist Hubert Laws. This is intended to be a tribute to the late Martin Luther King. He will then perform Carnatic concerts at the Lincoln Centre in New York and embark on a West European tour. Later in this year he has two of his most ambitious projects: to write an "Olympic Symphony" commissioned by the New American Orchestra for its debut during the Los Angeles Olympics. The other to score the music for Peter Brook's venture *Mahabharata* to be staged during the Festival of India scheduled in Paris in early 1985. —RAMESH CHANDRAN in Paris

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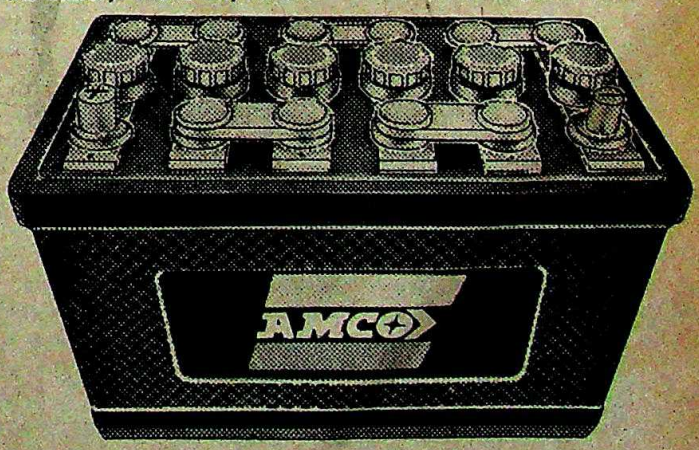
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CHINA

Two Track Policy



CHINESE Premier Zhao Ziyang's visit to Washington once again brought to the surface the festering chancre that bedevils closer relations between the two nations: the issue of Taiwan and the US's continuing economic and military relationship with the island that the People's Republic of China considers to be a breakaway province which sooner or later must be brought back into the bosom of the motherland.

The message that the Chinese leader had no intention of softpedalling the Taiwan issue was telegraphed well in advance from Beijing in the authoritative Communist Party journal, *The Observation Post*. Zhao, the journal proclaimed in unusually anti-American stridency, would not "kowtow to the White House". Calling US support for Taiwan the "destructive aspect" of Sino-US relations, the article lambasted "US rulers who are accustomed to seeking backing from political figures with out-of-date ideas." And the article suggested that any deterioration in Chinese-American relations over the Taiwan issue would be a political set-back for President Reagan. The Chinese political sage who penned this analysis is obviously long on beard and short on wisdom. The conservative political base that catapulted Reagan into prominence is outspokenly pro-Taiwanese and rigidly anti-communist.

Moral Commitment: The reason that Reagan has played it cool rather than ideological on the Taiwan issue is because he has come to accept what is a true American consensus on relations with that region. Since June 1950, when the US Seventh Fleet sailed into the Formosa Strait, American policy makers have insisted that the Taiwan dispute be settled peacefully. The prevailing American consensus emerged in the 1970s following Nixon's visit to Beijing and the signing of the Shanghai communique. It embodies a two-track policy that calls for a continuing improvement of relations with China while maintaining support for Taiwan. America's recognition of the legitimate need for Taiwan's security is written into law—the Taiwan Relations Act of April 1979.

For all the public pronouncements emanating from Zhao's Washington visit, there is really no new ground broken. But by the same token—for all the tough talk in Beijing—relations haven't soured either. Reagan stuck by his previous assurances to Chinese leaders that he would never infringe on Chinese sovereignty or interfere in China's internal affairs or pursue a two-China policy. But at the same time he will not be budged from his belief—a belief shared by a large number of Americans—that the US has a moral, historic, and legal commitment to maintain an adequate defence capability for Taiwan until reunification with the mainland—if it takes place—occurs under peaceful conditions.

Non-violent Methods: At least for now, the Chinese leadership has publicly abjured the use of violence to reunify Taiwan with the mainland. The new tactic has taken on the trappings of the courtship of a wayward lover or the coaxing and cajoling of an errant son. Orwell's "memory hole" into which history and objective reality were trashed by "Big Brother's" pen-pushing propagandists, is alive and well and living in Beijing. Chiang Kai-shek, whom the communists had unceremoniously dumped into the dustbin of history as a "bandit", and "running dog" has suddenly found respect in China.

"Running dog" Chiang is now respectfully referred to as "Mister" Chiang. Communist Party officials are now directed to extol him as the local hero of the mainland Chinese village where he was born. Chiang is now a "historical figure". The Chinese communists' "dispute with him is a problem left with history." The Chiang family mansions, ancestral shrines, the tombs of his relatives that were desecrated, pillaged and destroyed by the Red Guards under Mao have been renovated and restored by Deng. The honey is being laid on thick to woo Chiang's successor—his son, President Chaing Ching-kuo—into opening reunification talks with the mainland.

In issuing a general invitation to Taiwanese to feel free to visit the mainland, General Secretary Hu Yaobang quoted an ancient proverb: "A tree may grow 10,000 ft but its leaves fall back to the roots." Under the Communist Party's reconciliation policy the tomb of Chiang Kai-shek's mother has been painstakingly restored. Her epitaph: "A model woman", is once again inscribed on her resting place on a pine-covered hill.

"We are all descendants of the yellow emperor," a senior foreign ministry official recently told a *Washington Post* correspondent in Beijing. "Chaing Ching-kuo is an educated man. He shouldn't forget his home. He mustn't. We welcome him to come back for a look or to stay."

American Fears: Despite the saccharine verbiage dripping off dialectical tongues the Reagan Administration still believes in the possibility that China might some day attempt to resolve the Taiwan issue by the use of force. Reagan's advisers believe that even though Taiwan may not yet require sophisticated FX fighters it has been demanding, the Administration's policy ought to be to "stabilise" Taiwan by selling the weapons it legitimately needs to deter any future use of force by Beijing. This implies that if the US perceives any increase in threats to Taiwan's security, it will increase the quality and quantity of arms it sells Taiwan.

The prevailing American consensus emerged in the 1970s...it embodies a two-track policy that calls for a continuing improvement of relations with China while maintaining support for Taiwan.

The August 17, 1982, joint communique—the first that Reagan signed with Chinese leaders—does not preclude continued US arms sales to Taiwan. In fact, shortly after that communique was signed, the Reagan Administration assuaged Taiwan's fears by pointing out that the communique did not set any deadline for ending arms sales to Taiwan; did not call for prior consultation with China on arms sales to Taiwan; did not call for the US to mediate between Beijing and Taipei; did not agree to revise the Taiwan Relations Act; did not ask the US to exert pressure on Taiwan to enter into negotiations with the Chinese communists.

A recent paper prepared by a leading Washington think-tank with close ties to the Reagan Administration which discusses the various disincentives and incentives for a Chinese use of force against Taiwan; lists four disincentives:

- The use of force would cause nations the world over to reconsider their China policies. Washington would react by providing military aid to Taiwan as well as resorting to trade sanctions against Beijing. This would be a severe blow at a time that Beijing is openly and unabashedly asking the US to set up joint economic and industrial ventures on Chinese soil to help modernise China's economy. A Chinese invasion of Taiwan would not sit well in Third World capitals and in China's Asian neighbours, and would undermine its objective of assuming a leadership position among developing nations.
- An air attack against Taiwan may not succeed immediately. And it could take a considerable amount of time for the People's Liberation Army (PLA), to subdue a much smaller Taiwanese army.

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international backlash resulting from sympathy for the Taiwanese underdog battling the Chinese dragon, may well retrieve Taipei from diplomatic isolation and give the island the political rebirth it has been seeking.

• There is almost total opposition to communism in Taiwan. "A surprise attack by air probably could destroy Taiwan's air defence system, the backbone of its deterrent posture; and a submarine blockade would in all probability undermine the island's economy, the most essential element of its survival. But neither approach would eliminate conventional and guerilla resistance on the ground, which could be defeated only at frightful cost through an amphibious invasion."

• A less than successful invasion would have a devastating impact on the future of Beijing's leaders resulting in bloody purges. "A reopening of the civil war with the Nationalists might be hasty, imprudent, and unnecessary."

Among the incentives:

• The Chinese sense of historic obligation—the elimination by force of pretenders to the crown, breakaway provinces and rival power—remains strong. Beijing has not forever renounced the use of force to settle its dispute with Taipei. Bruce Swanson wrote in his book *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*: "The ancient issue of grand unification remains a matter of unswerving concern to the Beijing leadership, for as long as the island remains independent, the mainland government can be viewed by its subjects as weak and unable to unify the nation."



Zhao (left) and Reagan: troubled ties

• China's long-term security is at stake because Taiwan controls access to the Taiwan Strait and the Bashi channel, both critical passageways through which the Soviet fleet must sail to establish its presence in east Asia. China is currently establishing a maritime fleet. Taiwan's position offers access to the Pacific for China's future ocean-going fleet. The island could also serve as a front line of defence against sea-borne attack by either of the superpowers. It is essential to Beijing that no superpower gains access to Taiwan's bases. China would most certainly be forced to attack if Taiwan ever decided to play its "Soviet card" by seeking a Soviet military presence in order to increase its sense of security.

• Taiwan's demonstrable economic success is an embarrassment to mainland China just as the success of the Kuomintang (KMT) is in government. It is one more example of the great contrast of this era —"the difference between socialist and non-socialist economies of divided countries such as Germany and Korea." The standard of living in Taiwan is beyond the mainland's wildest economic dream. "Learn from Taiwan economically" was a slogan promoted by the Communist Party during its four modernisation programmes.

"As long as the KMT remains in control in Taiwan and the island's economy prospers, Beijing faces a dilemma in its own modernisation plans," says Martin L. Lasater, a Washington-based international consultant. "It must succeed in order to prove that communism is 'good' for China. To fail to do so carries the risk of an eventual collapse of the system."

• The Communist Party is factionalised. One way for a competing faction to score quick political brownie points is to keep the Taiwan issue alive by putting it on the front burner and challenging the ruling faction for its "inaction" on Taiwan. In China's political climate it is easy to see how an opportunistic bureaucrat in power may be tempted to grab the Taiwanese bait dangled by a rival politician and attack Taiwan in order to save his own position.

Reclaiming Programme: Every Chinese leader has issued a timetable for regaining control of Taiwan. Deng set the return of Taiwan to the mainland as one of his three top goals for the 1980s. A change in China's rulership could also pave the way for an invasion of Taiwan. As Michel Oksenberg and Richard Bush noted in *China's Political Evolution*, the system created by Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yu is riddled with instability.

"To begin with, the major instruments of totalitarian rule have been weakened, but not eliminated. The military, the public security forces, the propaganda apparatus have yet to acquire roles in domestic affairs commensurate with the objective resources under their command. They are potentially destabilising institutions and focal points of resistance to the system that Deng and Chen have forged.

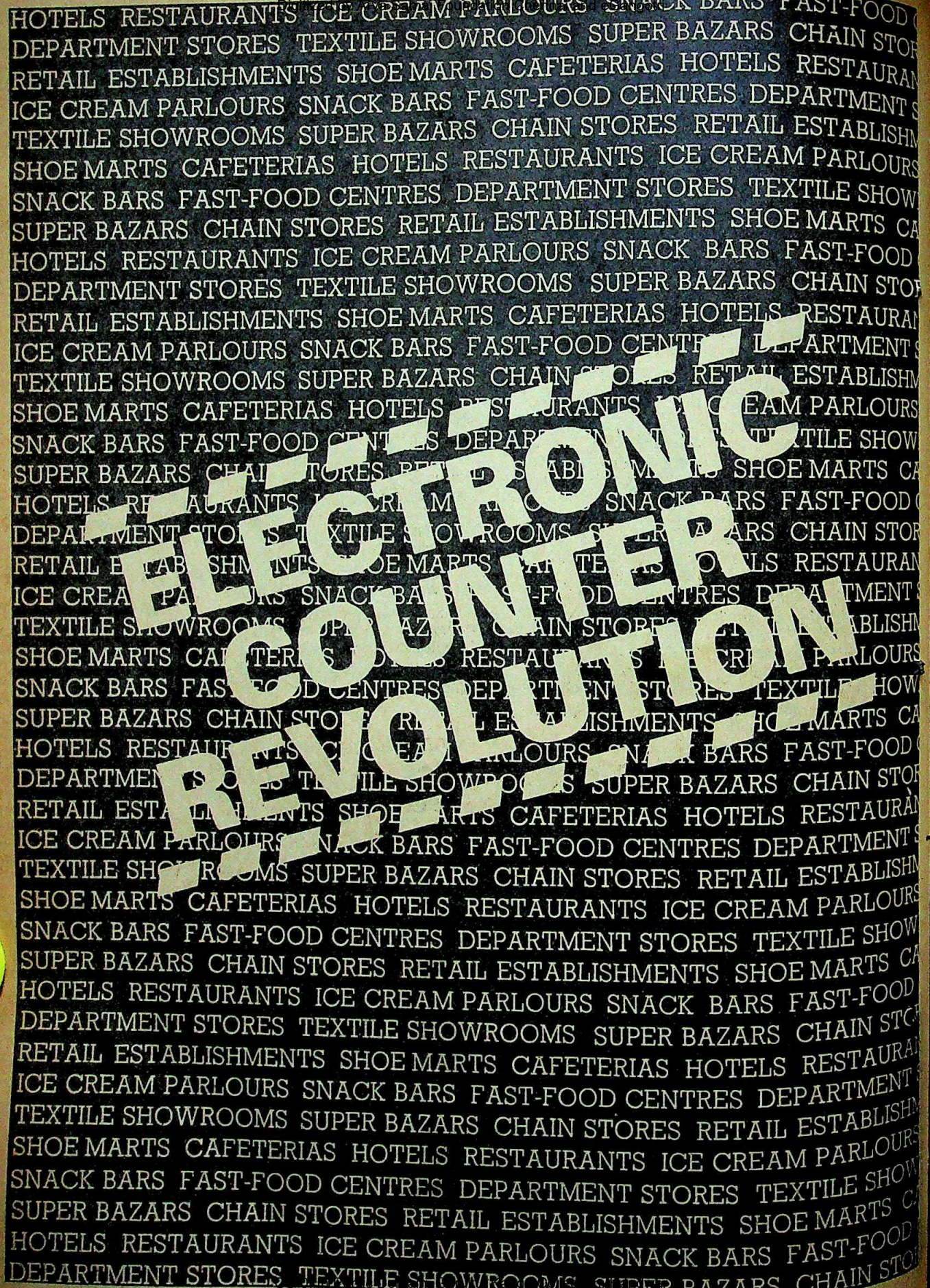
"Over a protracted period, the Deng-Chen system could prove to be one in which tensions accumulate but for which there are no adequate safety valves.... Some of these are civil-military relations, the highly unequal living standards and opportunities for social mobility between urban and rural areas, tensions between coastal and interior provinces since benefits of China's opening to the West flow more rapidly to coastal provinces."

There are sound reasons for Beijing to avoid a military confrontation over Taiwan but there are also other forces at work that could quite easily propel the mainland onto the war-path.

Another Invitation: To sweeten the pot for Taiwan, the mainland has issued a reunification proposal under which Taiwan would be allowed to retain its autonomy, its own armed forces, and its capitalist economy, and its trade and cultural relations with other countries will remain untouched. But the Taiwanese, who accuse the mainlanders of treachery, deceit and broken promises, continue to reject reunification. As Robert Keatley, editor of the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, reported: "Beijing will have great difficulty convincing Chinese businessmen that China will not meddle in the free market system... they aren't eager to risk everything on vague promises from officials who are ideologically opposed to the economic system here and who understand it little. Claims that local ways of life won't change if the communists take over... leave them unconvinced. Chances are, many will leave, perhaps taking prosperity with them".

And the Taiwanese frequently recall that China made similar promises in a signed agreement with Tibet in 1951. In return for Tibet agreeing to become a part of China the Chinese promised Tibet autonomy, its right to maintain its political system under the Dalai Lama, their right to retain their religious practices and monasteries and the revenues from the monasteries. After PLA troops marched into Tibet the communists added 60 supplementary provisions to their agreement with Tibet which nullified every promise they had made.

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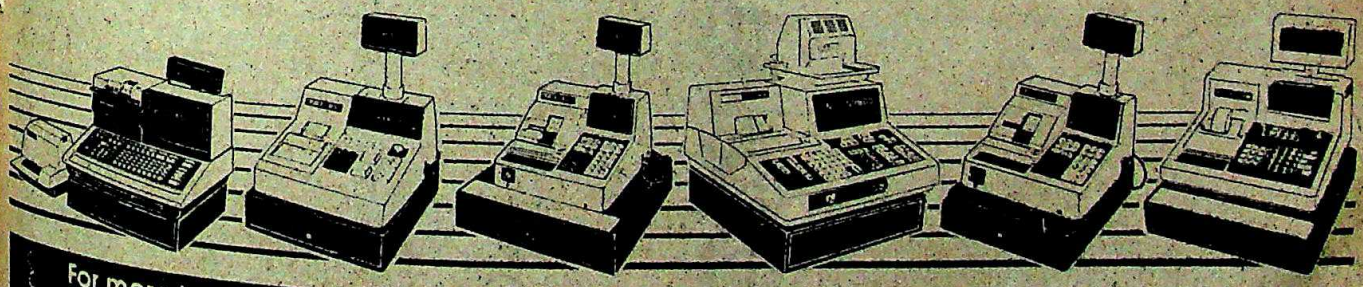
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STATE GOVERNMENTS

Strategy Of Siege



IT IS an occupational hazard of politics that politicians regard themselves indispensable for the high offices they chance to hold. The hazard is greater in India because while men and women in politics are still ashamed to identify themselves as professional politicians—look up the official who's who of the national and state legislatures and you will find almost three-fourths of our legislators describe themselves as 'social workers', which is both a camouflage and a euphemism for 'politicians'—they have nowhere to turn to once they are thrown out of office. The neurotic obsession of indispensability has seized the Congress(I) by the throat. The electorate is slipping out of the single dominant party system, that is, out of Congress rule. But the ruling incarnation of India's carryover national party just cannot persuade itself that the country can be governed and its national interests taken care of by political parties other than itself.

And so, with elections to the Lok Sabha looming, the Congress(I) high command has unleashed a seemingly nation-wide 'operation topple' against the states of Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, in that order. While details of the tactical war vary from state to state, the strategic objective is the same: to oust the non-Congress(I) governments from office and place these states under Central rule before the battle of the ballot is joined in.

Violent Protest: If reporters have not lied, the decision to wage an undeclared war on the 'opposition' governments was taken in the backrooms of the Calcutta session of the Congress-(I). In the three weeks that followed, disorderly and violent protests launched by Congress(I) men led to nearly half-a-dozen cases of police firing and as many deaths. Scores of men and women have been injured and several thousand Congress(I) workers or supporters arrested.

And still the ruling party has not succeeded in toppling any one of the four target governments. Something has gone wrong with the direction of the political war; something is missing making victory elusive, if not impossible. Under the Indian political dispensation, but unlike in federal systems like the US or West Germany, or even in countries like Italy where one party may rule at the national level and other parties at the local level, the party in power in New Delhi is unwilling to tolerate other parties ruling in the states. Here, too, as in every other sphere of Indian politics, the pattern of 'national' political behaviour was set by the Congress when it waged a 'war of liberation' against the communist government in Kerala in the late '50s and threw it out in 1959. Since then the Congress, in its different incarnations, as well as the Janata government of 1977-79 repeated the feat several times.

Why, then, is the Congress(I) Government at the Centre finding it difficult to throw out the four little regimes that seem to stand between it and its safe and easy return to power in the coming national poll? The prime minister has declared a hundred times that governments duly elected by the people must be allowed to govern for its full term unless it is defeated in the legislature by legitimate means. Why, then, are her men in Srinagar, Bangalore, Calcutta and Hyderabad taking recourse to street action and worse, to make it impossible for elected governments to govern? Why couldn't the Centre use plain governors to dismiss governments it refuses to tolerate?

The answer to these questions is simple. The Congress(I) is an infirm leviathan, pillaged of ideology, drained of morality, denuded of leadership, its massive hulk moth-eaten by factional feuds. Mrs Gandhi herself, with her huge personal charisma, is crippled by the effete bulk of her herd. Her own pronouncements betray a freeze of ideological and moral ferment which in the past supplied the Congress party with its political fire and vitality. "The great man of the age is the one who can put into words the will of his age, tell his age what its will is, and accomplish it," said Hegel. Nehru was a man of that greatness; he gave language and personification to the will of the Indian people. When Mrs Gandhi can bring herself to observe, as she did in Calcutta, that "in a democracy, there is no left or right", she can only expose the frozenness of her party and her government, at a stagnant and sterile somewhere of the Indian political spectrum.

PRADIP SAHA



Farooq and Hegde: comrades in arms

Unclear Perception: It is difficult for the ruling party to realise the cold reality of political change in India. It is no longer easy to throw out state governments elected by the people. In June 1983, the people of Jammu & Kashmir returned the National Conference (NC) to power in an election that was just as free and fair as the previous election in the state.

The Jammu & Kashmir unit of the Congress(I) refused to submit to the voters' verdict on the specious argument that the poll was neither free nor fair. This stand of the state unit was readily approved by the party high command, that is, Mrs Gandhi. Numerous legal cases were filed challenging the validity of the victories of NC candidates. The Congress(I) did not consider it worthwhile to wait for the court decisions. It did not boycott the new legislature as the West Bengal United Front had done, protesting the free and fair character of the 1972 election. The Congress (I) in Jammu & Kashmir launched street action against the elected Government.

Changing Relations: The confrontation between the NC and the Congress(I) destroyed the old framework of integration of the regional politics of Jammu & Kashmir with the Indian political mainstream. That framework consisted of growing linkages between Kashmiri nationalism symbolised by the late Sheikh Abdullah and the larger, all-embracing Indian nationalism. Even after the arrest of the Sheikh in 1953, the linking process remained uninterrupted as the Congress became a partner, direct or indirect, in the governance of Jammu & Kashmir. In 1975, Sheikh Abdullah and Indira Gandhi came to an understanding of seminal importance. The Sheikh accepted

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and the finality of Kashmir's accession to India. Mrs Gandhi guaranteed the regional autonomy of Jammu & Kashmir under Article 370 of the Constitution.

The current confrontation between Mrs Gandhi and Farooq Abdullah threatens to destroy the understanding of 1975. At her press conference in Calcutta on December 30, Mrs Gandhi said that "anti-national elements" were being "encouraged" in Jammu & Kashmir "either deliberately or unwittingly." As evidence, she cited what she had herself seen. The charge of "encouraging anti-national and secessionist elements" was buttressed with allegations that the Jammu & Kashmir Government had failed to maintain law and order in the state.

The ice did not melt at the 70-minute meeting between Farooq Abdullah and the prime minister on January 9. It was somewhat strange that the prime minister could find no time for months for the chief minister of a sensitive state like Jammu & Kashmir, not even when she had "seen with her own eyes" that the chief minister was "encouraging" destabilising elements. When she finally found time, Farooq was apparently unable to convince her that the law and order situation in Jammu & Kashmir was not worse than it was in most other states in India and that he was giving no quarter to anti-national elements.





NTR (left) and Basu: facing a common foe

AT CALCUTTA and in Delhi Farooq was the target of Congress(I) cohorts. Indeed, Congress(I) elements organised a disorderly and violent protest in Calcutta, which led to police firing, a couple of deaths, and the burning of several state buses. In Jammu & Kashmir, in a span of 80 days, the Congress(I) held 108 rallies and 73 dharnas and demonstrations including 24 in December alone.

And still Farooq remains in power and indications are that he will not be overthrown. The Governor, B.K. Nehru, did not succumb to the Congress(I) perception of the law and order situation in Jammu & Kashmir. Farooq's brother-in-law G.M. Shah has not been able to wean the 12 NC legislators he needs to snatch away Farooq's majority. Several factors have worked in the chief minister's favour. There is no one of any political or moral stature in Kashmir, no Sheikh Ghulam Mohammad or G.M. Sadiq, whom Mrs Gandhi can offer as chief minister without seriously alienating the vast majority of Kashmiri Muslims. Farooq has not only projected himself as "an Indian first and a Kashmiri second", he has joined forces with the opposition chief ministers and parties, and become part of the national political mainstream. If he is dismissed by a presidential fiat, he will be more popular not only among the Muslims of the valley but also among the Muslims of India.

Farooq has done something his father had studiously refrained from doing; he has made a bid to be recognised as an Indian rather than a Kashmiri leader. This astute political decision is based on a correct understanding of the drift and scale of political forces in India and the subcontinent. Farooq knows as much as does the prime minister that the great bulk of the Kashmiri Muslims no longer entertain a soft corner for Pakistan. Also, the rulers of Pakistan would not instigate trouble in Kashmir because they do not have any intention to give India any cause for provocation in their current external and internal security environment. Moreover, despite Article 370, a lot of business, monetary and technological linkages have been forged in the last 30 years between Kashmir and the rest of India. Jammu & Kashmir is no longer an isolated state.

In Karnataka, Mrs Gandhi has in Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde a staid, astute politician who is more than a match for her own mutually feuding satraps like Moily and Gundu Rao. The Congress(I) unleashed its toppling operations in Decemberwith an arsenal of weapons that included lakhs of rupees, political heavyweights from Maharashtra like Shalinitai Patil, tape-recorded deals and kidnappings. Moily had a midnight meeting with Governor A.N. Bannerji, which supplied momentum to a spate of rumours that Hegde was fast losing, if he had not already lost, his majority in the legislature. Two Janata MLA's were kidnapped; one Ugranarasimhappa, deserted the party for the Congress(I). In a counter move, Hegde admitted as full members of the Janata Party four independent MLA's including Byre Gowda of "Moily tape" fame.

Then, on January 17, Hegde staged his *coup de grace*. In an adroit pre-emptive move, he asked the Assembly for a confidence order to avoid the show down it was bound to lose miserably. As many as 128 members voted for the chief minister's motion, 15 more than Hegde needed for a majority. However, the impressive victory is no guarantee that the Congress(I) will call off its toppling operation Predicted *The Times of India* the "indefatigable" Moily "may want to avenge his political humiliation by redoubling his effort." Moily or Indira Gandhi?

Difficult Proportion: In West Bengal, the faction-ridden Congress(I) cannot take on the Left Front Government. At the Calcutta session of her party, Mrs Gandhi adopted a two-faced stance on the communist left. The political resolution did not attack the Left Front governments of West Bengal and Tripura. She herself refrained from attacking them in her speeches. But her studied silence was more than made up by Rajiv Gandhi who made the Government led by Jyoti Basu the main target of attack. A hostile demonstration at the airport against Farooq Abdullah was organised by the Priya Ranjan Das Munshi faction. When the West Bengal police arrested Munshi and two other leaders, Congress(I) cohorts were let loose in different parts of the city. On January 19, the agitation quietened down, reportedly on orders from New Delhi.

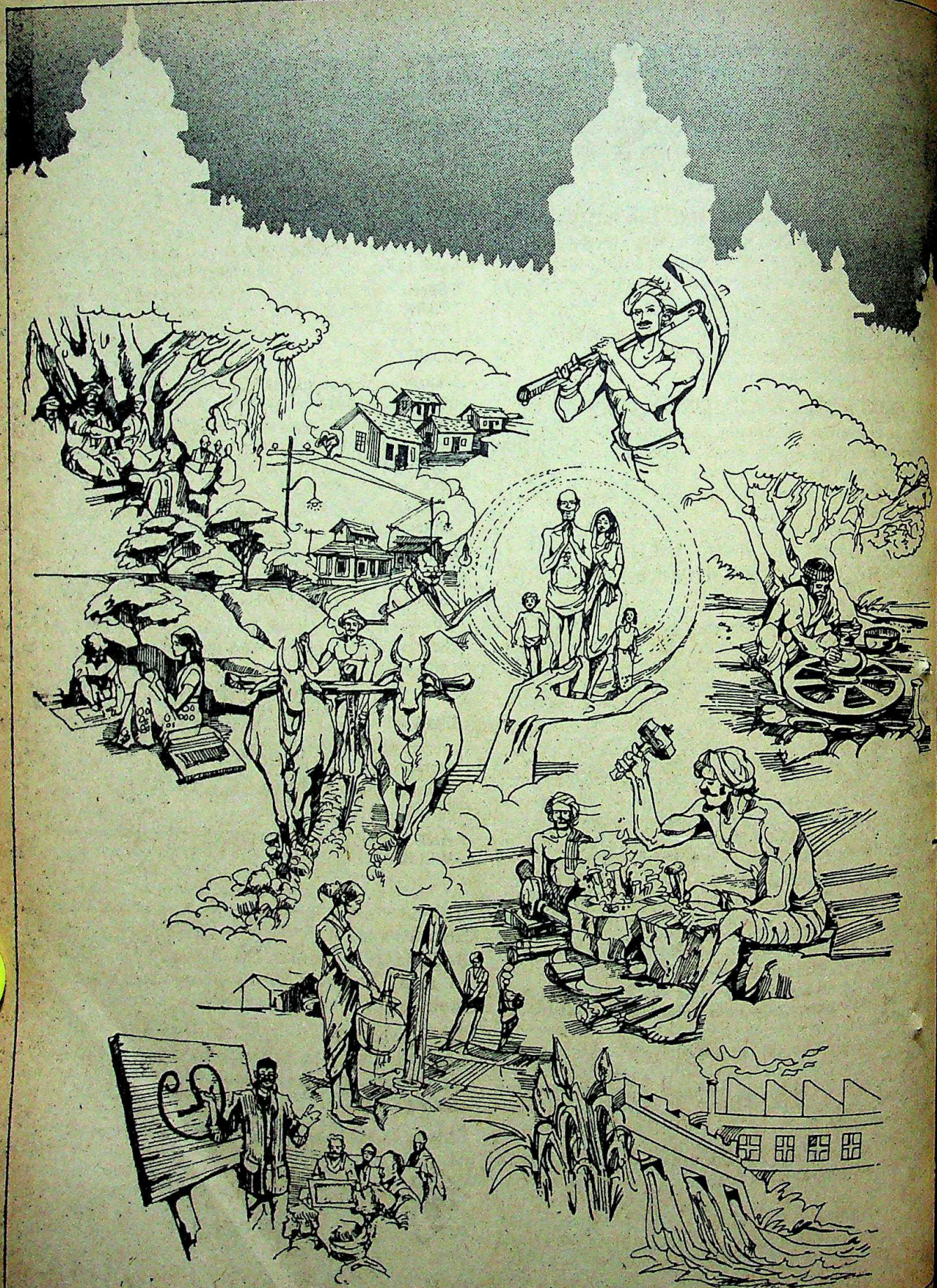
On January 13, three Congress(I) leaders of Andhra Pradesh met the prime minister to report on how the Telugu Desam Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao had determined to dislodge the Congress(I) from its deeply entrenched rural bases in the state. Only four days before, NTR had announced that the panchayat committees would be abolished forthwith throughout the state and their positions taken over by "mandals". The Congress party controls 80 per cent of the panchayat committees under which traditional landowning and money-lending interests collect land revenue and maintain land records. NTR is evidently determined to bring the three-tier local government system in rural Andhra Pradesh under the influence and control of his own party. The size, nature and volume of the agitaion would be determined by the final electoral tactics of Mrs Gandhi.

Future Programme: Three main points emerge from the foregoing account of the Congress(I) pre-poll political war on the four "opposition" ruled states. First, the central leadership of the party wants to topple one or more of these governments—especially those of Jammu & Kashmir and Karnataka—as part of the coming election battle. Second, the wish is proving to be difficult to achieve as a result of quantitative change in Indian politics. Thirdly, even if one or more of these governments can be thrown out, the action may not be justified by election results. The Congress(I) may lose more seats.

There is another question far more important than the gains or losses of the political parties. It is the question of how much load of disorder, violence and confrontation can a fragile democracy bear on its shoulders without showing alarming signs of breaking down? It is said in the Bible: "Unto whomever much is given, of him shall be much required." This poor country has given too much to its political leaders, particularly to leaders of the Congress(I). Of them much is required if Indian democracy is to remain alive and well.

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PROMISES FULFILLED... PROGRESS ACHIEVED.

It was one year ago, on 10th January 1983, that the Janata Government—the People's own Government—assumed office in Karnataka. Today, having completed an eventful first year in office, the Janata Government is proud to present to the people an account of promises fulfilled and progress achieved.

TOWARDS A CLEAN ADMINISTRATION:

* To curb corruption, Lokayukta being set up with jurisdiction over all public servants including the Chief Minister.
* A separate department set up for quick redressal of public grievances.
* A Bill to prevent defection.

DECENTRALISATION OF ADMINISTRATION:

* Democracy at grass root level—Bill introduced for the establishment of Zilla Parishads, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats.
* Elections to City Corporations and Municipal Councils held for the first time during the last ten years.
* Minimum age limit for voting reduced to 18 years in Municipal elections.
* Reservation of 20 per cent seats for women in Municipalities and City Corporation.

PRIMACY TO KANNADA:

* Teaching of Kannada in schools made compulsory.
* Use of Kannada at all levels of administration.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT:

* Provision of drinking water to every village in two years; 16,000 bore wells sunk so far.
* Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme for year round employment for agricultural labourers.
* Relief of Rs. 36 crores granted to farmers by way of waiver of loans, exemption from water rate, subsidy for failed wells, etc.
* 80,000 hectares of additional land brought under irrigation.
* All houseless and siteless agricultural labourers to get sites in two years—Rs. 12 crores spent on construction of Janata houses this year.
* Antyodaya for economic advancement of the poorest of the poor—introduced in 46 taluks.

INDUSTRY:

* The New Industrial Policy: Establishment of 1000 small and cottage industrial units every month.
* Special encouragement for handicrafts and handlooms; 20,000 Khadi and Village industrial units to be set up in five years.

EDUCATION:

* A comprehensive bill introduced for reforming the education system.
* Exemption from payment of capitation fee for Karnataka students in Medical and Engineering colleges.
* Ordinance issued for phased abolition of capitation fee in five years.
* Aksharasena—a massive programme started to eradicate illiteracy.

SOCIAL WELFARE:

* Direct employment to outstanding graduates from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
* Abolition of Devadasi system.
* Scholarship amounts increased for weaker sections.
* Minorities Commission and the second Commission for Backward Classes appointed.

EMPLOYMENT:

* Permanent employment provided for 24,000 daily wages workers.
* Pensions and Medical Benefits given to journalists with low income.
* AND MANY MORE MEASURES FOR PEOPLE'S WELFARE.

The odds were, and still are, heavy and the obstacles many. Still, with determination and dedication the Janata Government has striven to fulfil the needs of the people and translate their aspirations into reality.

The guiding principle of the Government has been, and will be, to strive for the welfare of the people, and the poorest of the poor among them.

This is our promise; this is our determination.

karnataka information

SURYA—DIP—907

JANATA GOVERNMENT—EVER RESPONSIVE TO THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE.

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BIHAR

Readying for Revenge

IN BARAHIYA, the rule of law is a distant and largely abstract concept. For in this small rural block of Monghyr district in Bihar, terror reigns. Criminals have over the last two years gone about their business with such impunity—robbing the poor and holding the rich to ransom—that the local people have been driven to take the law into their own hands.

Led by local landlords, they have, under the banner of the "Barahiya regiment", launched a determined agitation against the Government's failure to provide security. After an all-party meeting on January 1, the regiment organised a *kafan jaloos* (funeral procession) on January 3.

The 25-year-old, frail-looking "chief" of the regiment, Umesh Kumar 'Muni', says: "We have a cadre of die-hard youth who are fully armed. The youth, students and kisans of Barahiya have already taken a vow to finish for ever the trigger-happy criminals, blood-thirsty politicians and corrupt administration or lay down their lives."

Civil Disobedience: Elaborating on the form the agitation is to take, he says: "We decided that from January 1, we would stop paying taxes to the Bihar Government, disobey the administration and in case anybody dare compel us to follow the existing laws, we will counter it with all our might—if necessary, with arms. This will be the beginning of a six-month-long government of Barahiya regiment with a determination to finish the rule of politician-backed criminals."

The regiment had given the Government a three-point programme to be completed before the year-end. The Government, it said, must shoot all criminals, prosecute all politicians associated with them under Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code (which deals with murder), and round up all corrupt police officers and replace them with a special police force.

The regiment has already demonstrated its clout in the area. On December 15, it successfully organised a Barahiya bandh and observed a 'black day' on December 25. Appallingly, according to the statistics of the regiment, more than 500 people have been kidnapped for ransom, 200 dacoities committed and more than 200 women raped.

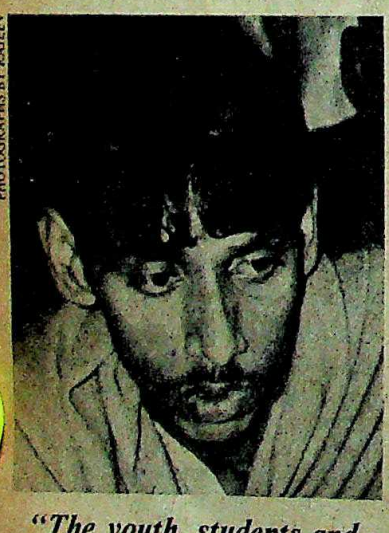
Organised Gangs: This rural pocket with a population of 92,000 is at present the hunting-ground of three large gangs. One is led by Mohan Singh, another by Bashista Singh and the most dreaded one, known as the 'Lalbagh group' by Tikker Singh. These gangs are so powerful that the people—mostly landlords—pay their ransom demands, which range from Rs 5,000 to Rs 25,000 without seeking police assistance.

Sitaram Singh, 26, son of a rich farmer, narrates his harrowing ordeal: "On October 7, I was sitting at a shop near my house. At around 11.30 a.m. four persons armed with guns came to me and asked me to follow. When we entered a lane, they demanded a ransom of Rs 25,000. I was taken to a hut and then I was confined with a sword hanging over my head."

Sitaram says that his family members paid Rs 5,000 and made a promise to pay another Rs 10,000 within 10 days. "I was released after 11 hours," he says. The criminals returned for the remaining money after 10 days but soon other gangs started threatening the family which fled from the village. Without informing the police for fear of reprisals, Sitaram and his family returned only after the Government posted armed guards.

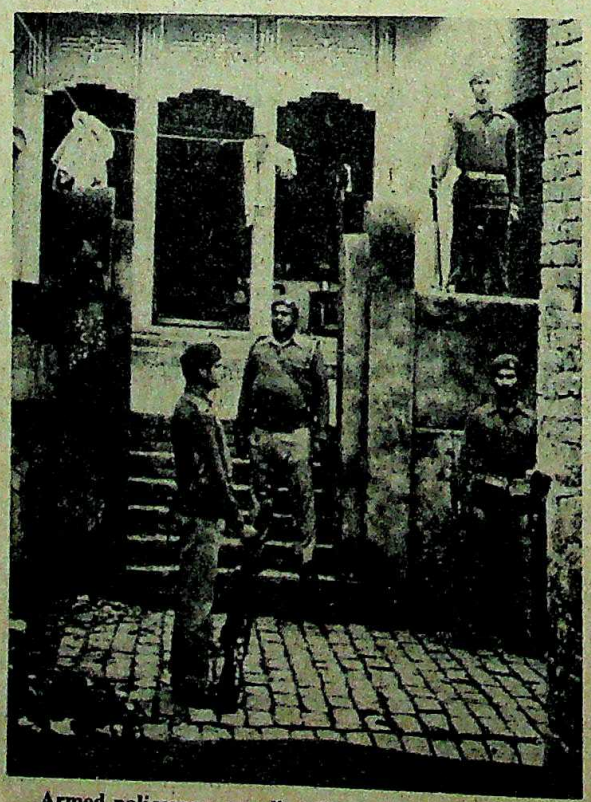
This is only one among scores of such tales of terror, a number of them told by bereaved relatives. Most of the victims, according to Muni, are schoolchildren from rich families which readily pay the demanded ransom. A local school run by Marwaris is almost empty after a series of kidnappings in the past few months.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAJEEV



"The youth, students and kisans of Barahiya have taken a vow to finish for ever the trigger-happy criminals, blood-thirsty politicians and corrupt administration or lay down their lives."

—Umesh Kumar Muni



Armed policemen guarding Sitaram Singh's house: living in terror



"The police has exhausted all its legal procedures and nothing much can be done about Barahiya. But there is something deep-rooted behind the desperate activities and land reforms are the only answer."

—SP R.R. Prasad

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But the rich are not the only ones who are victims of these marauders. The landless Harijans, who comprise 20 per cent of the population, are the worst victims since they have no money to pay or to survive the looting. Their houses are frequently plundered and their women raped—and they are tortured to keep them away from the police.

Nawatola, a small settlement in Barahiya town, wears a deserted look, as do the nearby villages, Tartal and Kishanpur. Says 72-year-old Sitaram Sao of Nawatola with tears in his eyes: "Criminals entered my house and looted away everything I had. Now I am a beggar and left alone in the tola as others have fled. Even my bread has been snatched away."

"The day is not far when the whole of Barahiya would be empty," says a villager. Regiment leaders say that in six months about 2,000 people of backward communities besides many rich farmers have deserted their homes. The Barahiya regiment estimates that in just two years, the gangs have earned roughly Rs 50 lakh. Kidnapping has become a booming business, an industry without investment and we the people are cheap raw material," says Sitaram.





Sitaram Singh (left) and Sitaram Sao: harrowing ordeal

THE PROBLEM in Barahiya is not simply one of crime and control. In this backward area south-west of the Ganga, there has never been enough land to go around. Traditionally, the land was controlled by a handful of landlords—all descended from one Pran Thakur who was given the land as a jagir five centuries ago. The landlords enforced their will and perpetuated their power structure with brute muscle power.

Democracy brought new theories and simmering clashes (basically economic, but usually on caste lines) between the haves and the have-nots. But along with democracy came modern-day politics, and some politicians soon learnt to use the traditional feudal techniques of the landlords to enforce their own authority in an area in which booth capturing and other forms of political terrorism are not unknown.

Revenge Motive: While most of the gangs are involved in dacoities and toll collection (known as "rahdari tax"), the Lalbagh group led by Tikker Singh, is said to be working out of vengeance against politicians who had let them down after having lost the 1980 elections.

Six years ago, Tikker Singh was a student, young and handsome. One day he fell victim to a gang leader, Dewan Singh, who sodomised him. The incident angered the student community and led to an agitation and violence. Curfew was imposed and there was some police firing in which several students were killed.

Tikker Singh, then Sunil Kumar Singh, dropped out of school and vowed to avenge his humiliation. According to police sources some landlords who wanted to finish Dewan Singh and his gang, also encouraged Sunil and promised to pay him money to destroy the gang.

Sunil changed his name to Tikker Singh and formed his own gang. One day he shot Dewan in court but those who had promised him money backed out. The police suspects that Tikker has made his target only those who had ditched him then. "But once he has tasted blood, he is working like a man-eater," says one official.

Political Nexus: Regiment leader Muni alleges that a senior Janata Party leader and former minister, Kapildeo Singh, had helped set up the gang after Dewan Singh, whom he had earlier protected, changed loyalty during the 1980 elections.

Kapildeo Singh, an ardent socialist, did not react to this charge. He told INDIA TODAY that he knew he was "the main target of the feudals of Barahiya". Singh, who belongs to a landless Bhumihar family and had been elected to the Assembly several times with the support of the landless, said that the zamindars who traditionally support the Congress(I), see "all the evils" in him because he had organised the landless, thus posing a major challenge to them. He recalled that when he started a land struggle in the 1950s, at least 20 people were killed.

Singh claimed that since some of the criminals belong to his clan, the landlords found it convenient to blame him. He said that it was the zamindars who had used the gangs. But when they failed to pay them what they had promised, the criminals turned against them. He further claimed that it was the zamindar youth who were terrorising the poor and indulging in wanton rape and plunder. Now, he says, the same youth were crying loot, murder and rape.

Surprise Letter: Tikker's story got an unexpected twist recently, when Monghyr Police Superintendent Rajiv Ranjan Prasad received an inland letter from him asking for a meeting. The letter narrated in broken Hindi how the poor in Barahiya had been exploited and tortured by the landlords, the police and politicians, thus driving people like him to crime.

He said that if he gave up the life of crime the landlords and politicians would tear him to pieces, while if he did not, the police would one day kill him. "Where have I to go?" he asked. Prasad immediately sent him an official reply inviting him for talks.

Ever since the local police outfit was changed a couple of months ago in response to the regiment's agitation, the new officers, backed by two companies of Bihar Military Police and one company of mounted police, has made some headway. In recent raids, the officer-in-charge, Mohammed Husnain, and Sub-Inspector Shams Alam arrested five members of the Lalbagh gang, Naresh Singh, Arun Singh, Hardwar Ram, Ghotu Jha and Zulum Yadav.

But these are small fry. And local police officials are not optimistic. Prasad says that the Bihar Crime Control Act and even the National Security Act haven't worked. Though 12 criminals were arrested under the former and eight under the latter, they are all out on bail. "One main problem is that people are not coming forward to identify the criminals," says Alam.

In Patna, meanwhile, no one seems overly worried. When asked about the situation, the Inspector General of Police (Crime), Satya Narain Roy, spoke of the overall situation in the state, pointing out that on an average, 1.2 lakh cognisable offences are committed in Bihar annually and that murder and rioting are on the increase.

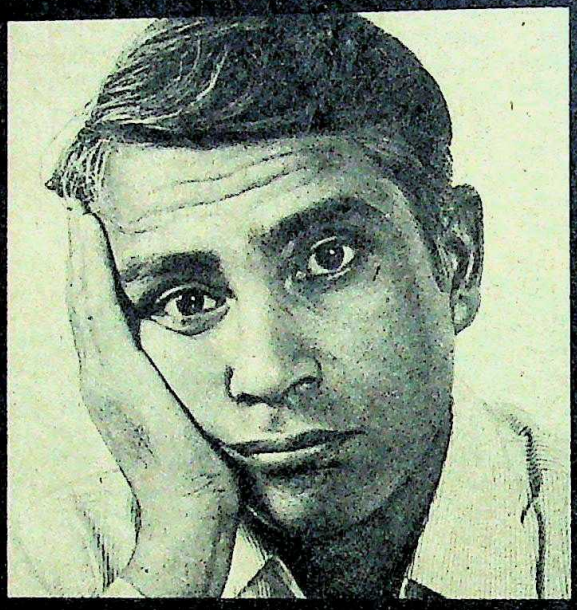
Officials on the spot are quite sure of one thing: that the cure for the malaise goes beyond mere police action. Prasad, in fact, sums it all up when he says: "The police has exhausted all its legal procedures and nothing much can be done about Barahiya. But there is something deap-rooted behind the desperate activities and land reforms are the only answer."

—FARZAND AHMED in Barahiya

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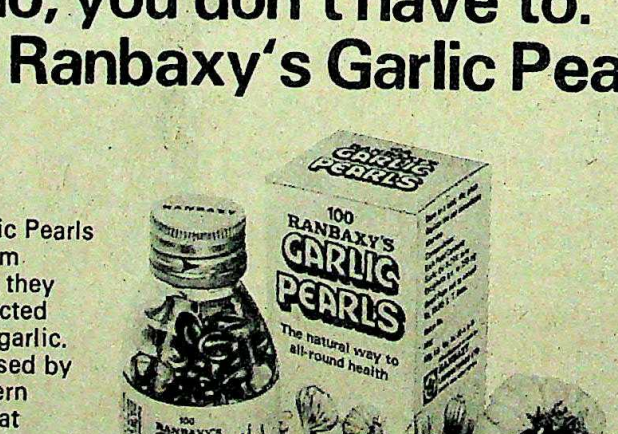
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VIJAYAWADA

The Vanishing Trick

INGENIOUS are the ways of money brokers—and R. Selvaraj just about beat the rest with an incredible scheme that promised to treble his patrons' money in 45 days. The only problem was that when his subscribers turned up to collect their harvest, they found that Selvaraj had vanished into thin air—owing them nearly a crore of rupees. The 28-year-old wizard from Vijayawada—the rich trading town on the Krishna—offered an amazingly simple deal: deposit any amount of money and come back 45 days later to collect goods for treble the amount. But, last fortnight as the anticipatory bail granted him by the Madras High Court expired, with no signs of Selvaraj surfacing, many among his 40,000 subscribers realised that with the broker, their money was also gone, perhaps forever.

So phenomenal, in fact, was Selvaraj's success, that in the three weeks just before his disappearance in December, he was taking in between Rs 3 lakh and Rs 5 lakh every day. In return, he was giving out goods worth only about Rs 1 lakh a day to his subscribers. The scheme was handled through the Sri Saptagiri Agencies, launched by Selvaraj curiously enough, on All Fools Day (1 April).

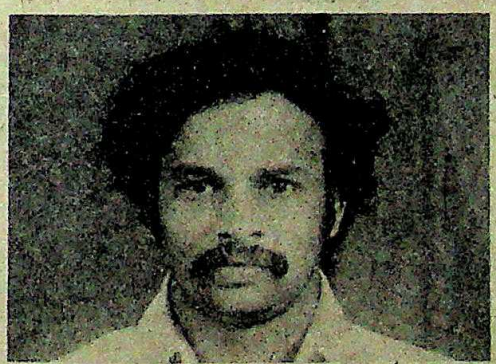
Incredible Scheme: On the face of it, his offer to buy and deliver goods for thrice the amount deposited 45 days later seemed plausible enough in a trading town where money could fetch exorbitant rates of interest. Moreover, if Selvaraj was buying the consumer goods—kitchenware, watches, clocks, steel furniture, cycles—in bulk, it was quite possible, Vijayawada residents felt, that he could meet his promise.

As the word spread, magistrates, doctors, lawyers, journalists all quickly enrolled themselves for the scheme, thereby giving it considerable credibility. Large numbers of thrilled housewives began pouring into Saptagiri agencies, convincing themselves and others about the quality of the goods and the assured returns of the scheme. Said R. Sampath, news editor, *Indian Express*, Vijayawada: "The press covered the bait. The two-thirds discount was not viewed as a lucky dip. People began to refer to Selvaraj as the only honest man in business about town."

Nothing could shake their faith in him. The first complaints came against him last September when he was unable to deliver the goods promptly on the 46th day of the deal. Even then, when the police booked him, a few women offered to bail him out. The first class magistrate refused to release him or the goods but Selvaraj appealed to the additional sessions judge and presented solvency certificates to prove his credit-worthiness. The judge then appointed a lawyer as commissioner to supervise the distribution of the seized goods. Ironically enough, the court case gave a tremendous impetus to Selvaraj's business since it now seemed that the entire operation had the sanction of the court.

Shrewd Operator: Selvaraj helped himself along by circulating handbills to further the impression and thereby improve his credibility. Said K.S. Vyas, superintendent of police, Vijayawada: "The business had almost become unmanageable by the time he disappeared. Selvaraj could not keep count of the money and he did not deposit it in banks." At one stage he ran out of receipt books and rarely was the amount collected entered on the counterfoil.

Moreover, few were willing to believe that the business could not be viable since it promised them such handsome returns. This despite the fact the Selvaraj's receipt made them no promise. It merely carried the name of the depositor, the amount deposited, the date on which the money was paid and the due date of delivery.





AHOBALA RAO

Selvaraj (top) and irate subscribers outside his deserted office: lost investment

Neat Escape: The police could make no case against Selvaraj as long as he distributed the promised goods on the due date. Nevertheless, Police Superintendent Vyas issued a public appeal in September not to enrol as subscribers. His message only went home when Selvaraj suddenly disappeared in December. Said Vyas: "Some lawyers and tax consultants are suspected partners in this money-spinning scheme. We are probing some leads." The police arrested G. Sattiraju who rented out his building to Selvaraj and Karnati Ramamohan Rao, another lawyer, for their alleged complicity in running the business. Selvaraj and K. Bhavanarayana, another lawyer, who are said to have been working together are still at large.

In their search, the police recovered goods stacked in Bhavanarayana's home. They also claim to have evidence to prove that Sattiraju was buying the goods for Selvaraj on a 2 per cent commission. Ramamohan Rao insists he has been falsely implicated. Said he: "My relationship with Selvaraj is that between a lawyer and his client. Now that I am implicated I am bound to divulge details only in court."

Selvaraaj left few clues behind. N.R. Wasan, assistant superintendent of police, and Inspector S.H.N. Sastry, the principal investigators rushed to Madras only to find that the native address given to the court in Vijayawada and others was false and the solvency certificates were fake. Selvaraj had no known criminal record in Tamil Nadu. Said G. Ethirajulu, a railway employee who had deposited Rs 3,000: " Local people are involved in giving protection. Otherwise, how can a man from Madras run a business in Vijayawada, close it suddenly and escape?"

While no one responded to the police appeal in September against depositing money, there has been an overwhelming response to the appeal from Vyas for details of Selvaraj's receipts. The piles of applications reveal that the gullible takers of the scheme were not only from Vijayawada but also from neighbouring districts like Khammam, Guntur, East and West Godavari. And while these losers are lamenting their fate, Selvaraj, wherever he is, is surely having the last laugh.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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BOMBAY

The Hotel Deaths

THE APPARENT suicide of Yamakawa Tokalwani, a Japanese interpreter who jumped to his death from the 16th floor of a Bombay five-star hotel last fortnight, would normally have been registered as just another statistic were it not for the fact that it formed part of a bizarre sequence. Tokalwani is the fourth instance of a Bombay luxury hotel being the unlikely setting for a series of sordid and curious crimes in the recent past. Though Tokalwani's death is an apparent case of suicide, the others have all been grisly sex-related affairs that have cast a murky shadow over the plush, confines of the city's luxury hotel club.

The involvement of foreign tourists and prostitutes in the chain of hotel crimes has



Lata's corpse: curious crime

added an intriguing element to the drama. Umee Mubarak from Abu Dhabi checked into the Sea King hotel at Juhu on November 8. Barely taking time to deposit his luggage, he demanded directions to the city's red light district. He returned shortly with a girl called Lata in tow, having picked her up from the notorious Kamathipura area. Five-and-a-half hours later, at 7.45 p.m., residents of Parul Apartments which face the hotel were startled to see a young naked girl wrapped in a towel desperately clawing her way out of a seventh floor bathroom ventilator. She climbed onto a narrow ledge screaming for help, a terror-stricken look on her face. Before anyone could react, the girl slipped and plummeted to her death on the concrete seven flights below. When the hotel staff burst into the Arab's room, they found him negligently sipping whisky dressed in a loose shirt.

Negligent Police: He was drunk and when the staff asked him about the girl he pointed vaguely to the bathroom which was locked from the inside. The Arab claimed that the girl had an argument with him over the choice of food and had consumed too much liquor. The police concluded that the girl was drunk and this had led her to crawl out onto the ledge. The coroner's report, however, said that her stomach contained barely two pegs of whisky. Similarly, the police neglected to take fingerprints or note the injuries on her person. The towel the luckless Lata had worn remained on the ledge for two weeks after the incident and the press only came to know about the case 10 days later. By then, the Arab had been exonerated by the police and had flown back.

The second case was even more bizarre. Earlier this month, Naillu Abdullah, 33, a Kenyan citizen and mother of two, fell to her death at 5.45 a.m. from the 14th floor of the Taj Intercontinental. She had apparently climbed over the balcony and jumped off. Curiously, at the time she fell to her death, her husband, Fayrid Abdullah, was calmly sitting in the suite's bedroom with a prostitute called Meena. When questioned, Abdullah claimed that his wife was a lesbian and had insisted he bring a prostitute from Foras Road, for her sexual pleasure. Meena's story was that she had been asked to have sex with the woman but had made it clear she would only satisfy the man. Hotel employees testified to having served them drinks and one even claimed that there had been two prostitutes but one had slipped out.

Another Murder: Barely had the sensation died down when S.K. Jain, general manager of Texmaco, a Calcutta-based Birla company, was found murdered in his hotel room. Jain had come to Bombay on business and was staying at the five-star SeaRock Hotel. When a chauffeur arrived to collect him for the flight back, he found the door locked and no answer to his knocking. When the door was opened with a duplicate key, Jain lay dead in bed. He had been strangled and his thyroid neck bone was fractured.

At first, it appeared to be another sexrelated crime. There were semen stains and lipstick marks on the sheets and the scent of a woman's perfume. A lubricant on Jain's genitals seemed to confirm the original theory.

However, the case took a dramatic turn when police arrested Samad Khan, nephew of underworld figure Karim Lala and a one-time NSA detenu, for the murder of Jain. Khan was arrested along with seven other professional thugs. Police claim that Jain's murder was a case of mistaken identity and that the thugs had been actually hired to kill another Jain, a confidence trickster from Delhi, who had duped a leading Bombay gangster of Rs 2 lakh. But this theory has been greeted with some scepticism since [illegible] relating to the case appears to be missing. Police spokesmen claim the file contained routine information on a company Texmaco was planning to take over but other sources insist that the file contained the names of several important people. To add to the intrigue, a hotel employee, Claude Rosario, who was interrogated by the police about the Jain murder, committed suicide a few hours later by jumping under a train.

Cover Up: But the Jain case is not the only one shrouded in mystery. Both the Arab and the Kenyan involved in the previous two murders were cleared by the police and allowed to return home even though serious questions remain unanswered. A section of the Bombay press has charged the police with trying to cover up. Retorted Police Commissioner Julio Ribeiro: "I can only go by the evidence of witnesses and cannot make arrests if there is insufficient evidence.



CURRENT WEEKLY

Samad Khan: dramatic arrest

If the press knows more than we do, they are free to go to the coroner's court."

The police are not the only ones in the dock. The sensational series of crimes has caused major ripples in Bombay's lucrative hotel industry. Hotel employees claim that they are unnecessarily being given a bad name and dragged into the controversies when their only involvement is being used as the venues. But none of them is able to satisfactorily explain how red light area prostitutes can nonchalantly stroll in and out of lobbies without any questions being asked.

In the wake of the sensational events, security in all Bombay hotels has been beefed up. Even the police are taking no chances. After the Sea King affair, Ribeiro has issued instructions that all hotel deaths must be reported to the press. "Our only fault", he carefully agrees, is that we didn't disclose [illegible] death immediately." But considering the [illegible] rious nature and similarity of the deaths and the manner in which the police handled some of the cases, that might turn out to be an understatement.

—COOMI KAPOOR

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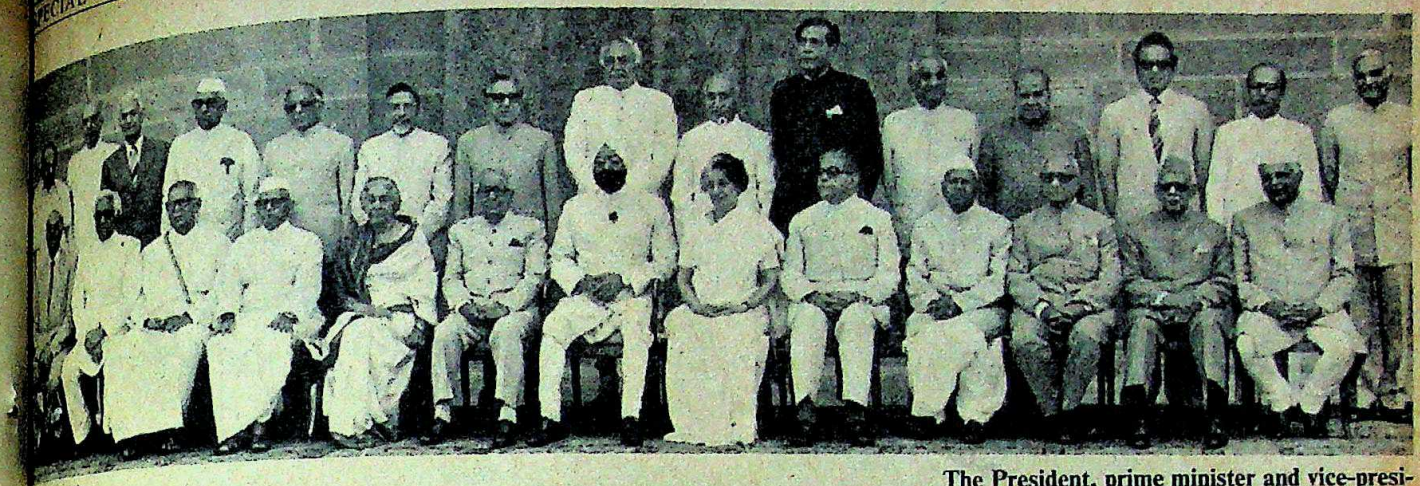
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The President, prime minister and vice-president with the governors: undefined powers

STATE GOVERNORS

The Duel Role

IT USED to be one of the cardinal rules of Indian politics that the governor of a state did not enter into the thick of everyday politics. His job was confined to cutting ribbons and swearing in ministers and judges. Not any longer. In one state after another the public is being treated to the mystifying spectacle of the governor squabbling in public with the elected Government.

In Orissa, Governor B.N. Pande, a 78-year-old veteran politician from Uttar Pradesh, is finding it difficult to change the habits of a lifetime. When water supply was disrupted by a strike as soon as he took over, he dramatically announced that he would not drink water from the Raj Bhavan taps till the workers' demands were met and the people of Bhubaneswar got regular water.

Activist Role: That by itself was quite enough to sour his relations with the state government but Pande has not stopped with that. In the last few months he has toured the state extensively and addressed nearly 100 public meetings. Everywhere, he goes he takes special care to inquire about rural welfare schemes and their implementation. He has never hesitated to speak his mind at such meetings, and a government spokesman defending his record recently had to proceed diplomatically through a minefield saying that "his statements were critical but constructive; not anti-government."

Similarly in West Bengal, Governor T.P. Sharma, another veteran Congress(I) war-horse put to grass, lost no time after arriving in the state, to get into a scrap with the Marxist Government about the appointment of the vice-chancellor of Calcutta University. As a result, now the Marxists have retaliated by boycotting all functions where the governor is present. Sharma does not appear concerned about the piquant situation and says unabashedly: "They are the losers, for more people attend my public meetings than those presided over by the ministers."

In Karnataka the new man in the job, A.N. Banerji, transferred recently from Himachal Pradesh is also involved in an unseemly exchange of charges, counter-charges and denials. He was first said to have requested an apology from a senior minister. Late it was clarified that he had only written to the chief minister asking for news reports of the minister's press conference, to check if any disparaging remarks had been made about the office of governor. Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde also added his mite to the debate on governors when he said a few months ago that governors had become "glorified servants of the Centre." When the governor delivered his Independence Day message 10 days later he took care to emphasise that governors were "the servants of the people."

Dual Role: Hegde's terse remark sums up the basic contradictions of the job. The governor is, in a way, a man who "wears two hats." He is on the one hand the head of federated state.On the other, he is the emissary of the Centre charged under Article 356 with the task of independently assessing the performance of a state government. Former governor Dharma Vira sums up the uneasy constitutional position by cryptically asking: "Whose rubber does he stamp?"

This dilemma has always lurked in the background. Today it has been thrown into sharp relief by a combination of factors. For a start, the men who occupy the Raj Bhavans are mostly tub-thumping superannuated politicians who have learnt their lessons in the streets and have little time for constitutional niceties. Also they are essentially party men who are not about to abandon the loyalties of a lifetime. Many would jump at the chance to get back into active politics. Of the 19 governors in office, 10 are former politicians. Ram Lal stepped down only reluctantly from the job of chief minister of Himachal Pradesh after an unsavoury scandal. He was despatched as governor of Andhra Pradesh, more to keep him out of harm's way than anything else. M. Channa Reddy who resigned after a brief stint as governor of Punjab was a similar case. He has now returned to active politics in Andhra Pradesh. Homi J. Talyarkhan, governor of Sikkim, is also said to dabble in Congress(I) affairs and a white paper brought out by the Karnataka Government on the role of the governor, mentions that he attended a Sikkim Congress Committee(I) public meeting.

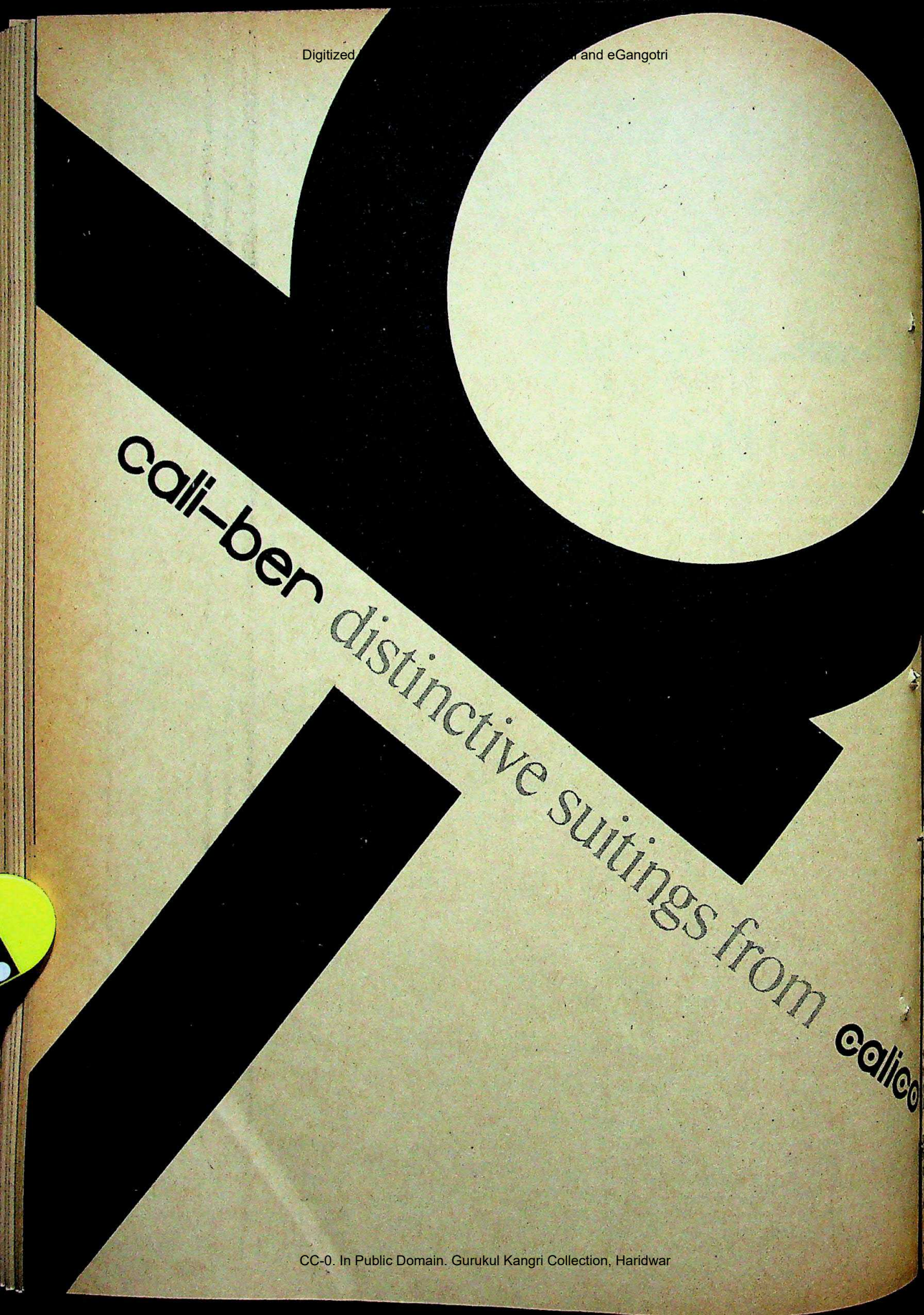
In an earlier age when the Congress ruled practically everywhere except for a few isolated pockets, the loyalties of the figurehead at the top did not matter very much. But with the Congress(I) in power at the Centre and a variety of national parties and homespun regional parties ruling in the states it has suddenly dawned on everyone that the governor may be a Trojan Horse sent by the Union Government. Says Lok Dal leader Shyam Nandan Mishra: "In the early years the governor was seen as the eyes and ears of the Central Government and friend, philosopher and guide for the state Government but now he has become the maker and unmaker of state governments and in some cases party manager also."

Such jitteriness is understandable. The governor does have powers to act independently using his own discretion in some very crucial spheres:

- Under Article 164 of the Constitution, he has discretion in appointing a chief minister;
- Under Article 174 he has the right to dissolve or prorogue assemblies;
- Under Article 356 he has the power to recommend the imposition of President's Rule. In fact he has more latitude than

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President, since the President has to on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers while the governor submits his report without seeking anyone's advice.

THE FEARS of the opposition parties are not unwarranted. In the 34 years since 1950 there have been 76 dismissals of state governments. And the trend has been rising in recent years. In the first 17 years there were only 11 dismissals; there have been 65 since then. And it should not be assumed that firing state governments is a Congress(I) monopoly. The Janata government of 1977 dissolved nine assemblies soon after assuming office and imposed President's Rule nine times during its brief tenure. Haryana Governor G.D. Tapase, not exactly one of the most distinguished governors of the country, says candidly: "It is not possible for him (the governor) to be independent of the party in majority at the Centre."

It might have been more reassuring for everyone if there had been a fixed set of ground rules for governors to go by. But both actions, the dismissal of governments and the appointment of new ones, has followed a crazy quilt pattern often with little regard to constitutional niceties. The most blatant example of bending the rules was, of course, by Haryana in 1982 when Governor Tapase advanced constitutional norms to a head start on the lawns of Raj Bhavan and swore in the Congress(I)'s Bhajan Lal post-haste before the Opposition had time to object. Tapase is old and infirm now and his capacity to carry his job is seriously impaired by Parkinson's disease but he still says, when asked whether governors should be allowed a second term: "If health permits and if the prime minister wishes."

Haryana is hardly a solitary example. The governors have frequently twisted the rules to suit the party's convenience. In Orissa for instance, in 1973, Biju Patnaik was not called to form a ministry even though he had a clear majority. Once it became clear that the governor would not call him to form a government it became an easy matter for the Congress to win back MLA's with notoriously fickle loyalties to the Congress(I). As per tradition, it is argued, the Opposition should have been invited by the governor to prove its strength in the House which was in session.

In Uttar Pradesh in 1970 the then governor Gopala Reddi gave the government to the Congress on a platter when he first imposed President's Rule, and then after 15 days invited T.N. Singh to form a ministry. The Opposition was never given a chance. More recently in Assam the Opposition claims it was not given a chance to prove its majority between December 1980 and March 1982.

Undefined Powers: The powers under Article 356 are even more difficult to define. It is certainly true that the governor has more leeway under the Constitution than the President when deciding whether to impose President's Rule or not. The governor's report recommending President's Rule is made completely on his own initiative—unless it is dictated for him in New Delhi.

Some concern is shown even in ruling party circles particularly when it comes to the powers given under Article 356 that the "Government cannot be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution." Rajya Sabha MP and Congress(I) jurist M.C. Bhandare, despite his party loyalties, admits that the power may be misused.



Governors B.N. Pande, A.N. Banerji, A.P. Sharma

That it had been abused is evident from a plethora of instances. In Kerala where majorities are always slender and only one ministry has survived its full term, it is accepted that the governor will put his weight behind the Congress(I). If it suits the Congress(I), the Assembly will be kept in suspended animation. If not, it will be dismissed. Invariably, every time the Congress(I) gets the benefit of the doubt. Says BJP General Secretary L.K. Advani: "Whenever a non-Congress(I) government felt it could fabricate a majority, the Assembly was placed in suspended animation. But when a Congress government or Congress-supported government fell, the Assembly was dissolved." Congress governments came into being in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Manipur in this manner, but no such opportunity was given to the Opposition when Congress governments fell in West Bengal in 1971, in Orissa in 1973 and in Kerala in 1982.

Internal Difficulties: The essence of the Opposition case is that President's Rule is imposed all too often to sort out the Congress(I)'s party problems and not because the constitutional machinery has broken down. "Scrap Article 356," West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu told INDIA TODAY, echoing a long-standing Marxist demand. "The governor's special powers should be taken away," adds Communist Party of India General Secretary C. Rajeswara Rao. Conscious of the constitutional weapon in its hand, no government at the Centre is likely to oblige the communists.

To give them their due, most governors manage to tread a middle path without too much trouble. Says former Karnataka Governor Govind Narain: "One swallow does not make a summer, nor does one bad governor mean that all governors are bad." But there are clearly others who keep their careers in mind. "A governor shall be appointed by the President by warrant under his head and seal and shall hold office during the pleasure of the President," say Articles 155 and 156 of the Constitution. In simple language that simply means that the Government in power in New Delhi decides. Though the Constitution does not allow for the dismissal of a governor, two have indeed suffered this fate: Raghukul Tilak from Rajasthan and Prabhudas Patwari from Tamil Nadu. Others to be gotten rid of are merely asked to resign which, with the exception of these two, they do.

While it is indeed right for the governor to determine which party enjoys a majority, it is also evident that as things are, there is no safeguard to ensure an independent decision by the governor. Many people suggest that an inter-state council as provided for under Article 263 should be set up to decide if President's Rule should be imposed. Jurist V.M. Tarkunde suggests that the governor should clearly specify why he is recommending President's Rule. This should then be made justiciable.

Whatever may be done in the future it seems likely that there will always be a grey area where the governors have to be allowed to use their discretion. As Tarkunde says: "A governor is an independent man who acts on the advice of his council (of ministers) except when he can exercise the discretionary powers he is vested with." But at the same time he is still his own man. This view is backed by Bhagwan Sahay, one-time governor of Kerala and Jammu & Kashmir, who in 1970 chaired a special committee to look at the role of governors, said: "I don't think the Constitution visualised him (the governor) as a ruler." But perhaps the real trouble is summed up by Inder K. Gujral, United Front secretary, who says: "Our Constitution is clear that the role of the governor was to maintain a liaison with the Centre and serve as head of state. While the first has been over-emphasised, the second role has been diluted and become almost extinct."

—PRABHA DUTT

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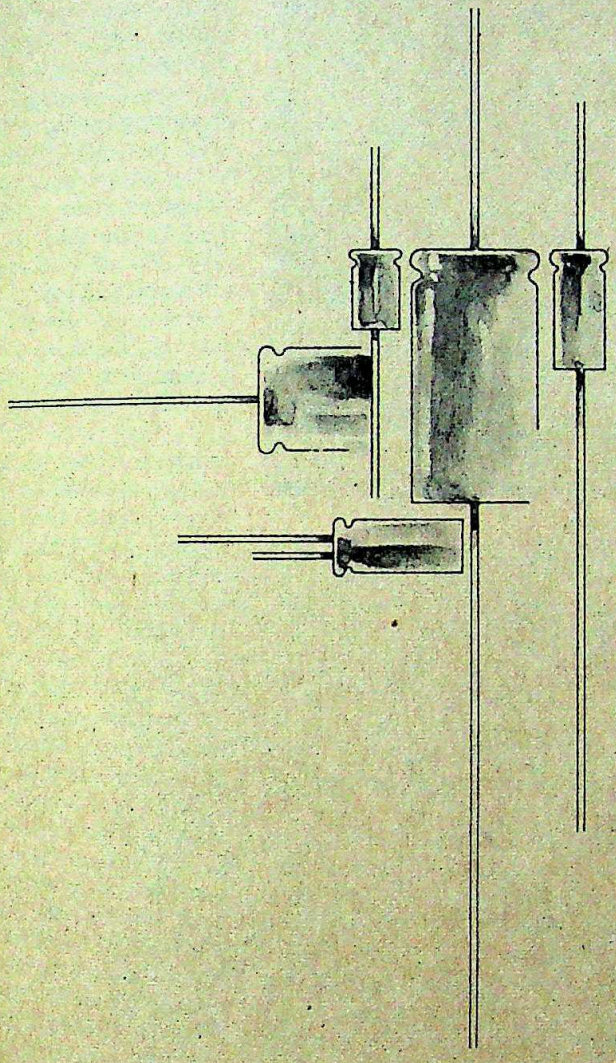
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BHAWAN SINGH



The Asiatic Society: abysmal upkeep

ASIATIC SOCIETY

Neglected Heritage

WHEN Prime Minister Indira Gandhi flew into Calcutta for a day last month to attend the bicentenary celebrations of the Asiatic Society and declare it an "institute of national importance", many thought the charges of gross neglect, mismanagement and theft that have plagued the 200-year-old institution in recent years would at last end.

Others thought that with the society being virtually baled out by the Central Government, its process of politicisation was complete. For it was clear that the prime minister had arrived at the behest of her Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, who became a member of the society last year and was quickly installed as the chairman of the bicentenary reception committee. Given the propensity of political leaders to associate themselves with cultural or academic institutions as a means of broking power and frequently creating sinecures for their favourites, it is not certain whether the Asiatic Society's future will be any better off than its disorderly past.

The oldest of India's colonial repositories of Asian art and literature, and by far the oldest Asiatic Society in the world, it contains a superbly varied collection of rare manuscripts, books, maps, coins, art objects and paintings. Behind its facade (now painted a hideous pink on the occasion of the anniversary) at the top of Calcutta's fashionable Park Street, are contained treasures as various as paintings by Rubens, another two by Sir Joshua Reynolds, Rennell's early maps of India and stacks of engravings in their original folios, by English and French artists such as Daniell, Solvyn, Prinsep and Fraser.

Valuable Storehouse: Considerably more ancient are palm leaf manuscripts dating from the 7th century, valuable Islamic texts—some of them calligraphic and illuminated originals—such as the history of Emperor Shah Jahan's reign containing his signature and a collection of poems by his daughter Zaibunissa, each page exquisitely illuminated in gold. In addition, the society possesses one of the finest collections of antique European books, the earliest being an astronomical treatise in Latin printed in 1499 A.D., and a collection of rare Indian coins that go back to the Gupta period.

But so abysmal has been the society's upkeep that neither the manuscripts nor its art works have been properly catalogued, much less documented regularly. Till last year, there was no proper counting of the estimated 24,000 ancient coins in the society's collection. When an expert was called in to count them, he found 58—of a total 228 gold coins last recorded in a 1971 count—missing. They had either been misplaced, or much more likely, pocketed. Of the total number of approximately 42,000 antique manuscripts in the collection, several illuminated Mughal pages have been known to turn up for sale in Lucknow.

The society is still reeling from the biggest shock of all: the disappearance of a [illegible] celess and historically unique copperplate [illegible] scription from the reign of the Emperor Ashoka (3rd century B.C.) known as the [illegible] gaura copperplate. It vanished from the [illegible] ciety's coffers sometime in 1977 or 1978 [illegible] its loss was not detected till 1979. [illegible] plaints lodged with the Park Street police [illegible] station yielded no results. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) was called in. In turn, it contacted Interpol, but six years later nothing is known of the inscription. From time to time, rumours on the international art history circuit activate wealthy Indian scholars and Education Ministry officials and the CBI is prodded into taking notice again. But the search for the Ashokan inscription in Brahmi script goes on. Last heard, it was said to have popped up at an auction in Sweden.

The informed nature of the thefts suggests that those well-acquainted with the value of the vanishing objects are involved. Knowledgeable members of the society's controlling council suggest that it could be anyone—members of the 100-strong staff in collusion with the honorary officials or even the 26 council members elected annually by the society's 1,200 members.

IN 1976, when allegations of the [illegible] and mismanagement became a public scandal, a fact-finding committee was appointed under the direction of Prof. P.C. Gupta, former vice-chancellor of Jadavpur, Vishwabharati and Rabindrabharati Universities. The distinguished historian was startled to find that the society's senior staff, such as the librarian, was not even aware of the exact number of manuscripts in the collection, no stock-taking on a regular basis had been undertaken, so that, he noted, "if some of them are missing, it would not be possible to trace them". In addition he reported that the society's members or the council members borrowed valuable books which they never returned, that its office-bearers were hardly to be found in office, and that lack of funds and an outdated constitution were the bane of the society's functioning.

Today, Professor Gupta, who served as the society's president from 1981 to 1983, says that despite his best efforts during the investigation it was difficult to ascertain precise facts regarding thefts. "I knew things were missing but it was impossible to locate evidence." He notes that part of the society's troubles stem from the fact that it is both overstaffed but mostly by people without any interest or expertise to manage such an institution. Said he: "The Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland is staffed by less than 10 people. Ours, though much smaller, has 101 people on its payroll and more are being added." He also points out that the

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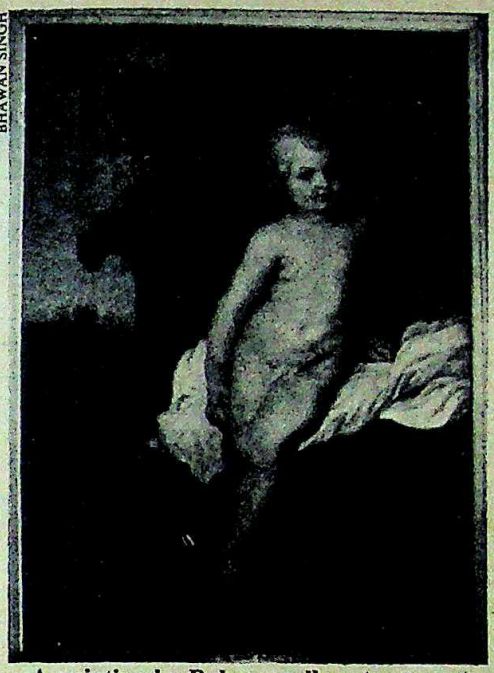
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ciety must share the blame for lack of maintenance funds. "We never seemed to follow up the Central Government on their offers. Getting more funding for an institution like this is a matter of pushing. The Asiatic Society simply did not make the effort."

Management Problems: In fact, during his tenure as president, an Asiatic Society proposal to the Ford Foundation for a US $1 million grant for the restoration and preservation of 75 oil paintings was approved. But it came to naught with his departure, and with the intensified efforts of the Education Ministry in New Delhi to pump in funds. Dr Nemai Sadhan Bose, professor of history at Jadhavpur University, who has been a society council member since last March and was also active in organising the bicentennial, admits to all the charges against the society's functioning. "What could we do?" he says, "we inherited all these problems of misuse and mismanagement."

He is now hopeful that the declaration of the society as a national institute—a move that will be gazetted soon by either a government ordinance or parliamentary bill—will bring a major change in its functioning and improve its financial situation. "Our expectations for the society's future are high," says Dr R.K. Pal, the society's current president, "the Central Government step-in has saved us financial harrassment." Adds a society member: "The society's money crisis may be over, but with political leaders getting in on the act, other troubles may lie ahead." Members quote the example of several national institutions of academic research and cultural learning that have deteriorated as a result of being transformed into preserves of political and bureaucratic lobbying. This is inevitable when increased patronage by the Government.

BHAWAN SINGH



A painting by Rubens: callous treatment

BHAWAN SINGH



The missing Sohgaura copperplate: priceless loss

Financial Dependence: The Asiatic Society has lately been subsisting mostly on grants from the Education Ministry of the Central Government, with the role of the State Government becoming gradually reduced. Earlier it survived on grants of Rs 1.1 lakh yearly from the education departments of the state and Central Government. But in the last three years, the Government of West Bengal coughed up ad hoc grants of an additional Rs 7 lakh to improve conditions. The Education Ministry in New Delhi matched the windfall by pumping in nearly Rs 12 lakh in 1983—no doubt as a result of Finance Minister Mukherjee's impromptu, and some say, inexplicable interest—and an additional Rs 4 lakh for organising the bicentenary celebration.

Yet the sudden flush of money may improve matters only marginally. Years of wholesale neglect and mismanagement have plunged the deteriorating fortunes of the Asiatic Society in a seemingly intractable mess. Its budget for 1984-85 shows a deficit of Rs 34 lakh. Seven shops that it lets out on the ground floor of its premises—which would otherwise net a landlord on Calcutta's prize Park Street a fortune—yield the society no more than Rs 1.84 lakh in rent. Worse still, members default by not paying their annual subscription of Rs 50. And though the society is meant to produce a quarterly journal, there hasn't been one out for years.

It is all a telling, if rather tragic commentary on how the labours of hundreds of painstaking scholars and men of adventure have slowly gone to waste. The society's founder was Sir William Jones, a judge of the old Supreme Court who arrived in Calcutta in September 1783. A man of prodigious learning and profound interest in Asian languages and history, he established the Asiatic Society a year after his arrival, inviting "30 European gentlemen of Calcutta" to weekly meetings.

Historical Repository: The then governor general Warren Hastings was the society's first patron and, in time, the Government granted it a free plot of land at the corner of Park Street for its building. The old building still exists together with a modern, four-storey structure completed in 1965. Over its 200 years of existence the society amassed, mostly through donations by European orientalists, a fabulous collection of literary, historical, scientific and mathematical manuscripts as well as art objects. Treasures came from the library of Tipu Sultan; scores of Englishmen retiring from the service of the East India Company made over their collections to the Asiatic Society. The society's large collection of European paintings, for example, was a bequest from a man of wealth and taste called Robert Home who served as court painter to the Nawab of Awadh in the late 18th century.

Today, specimens of Home's legacy, the Rubens and Reynolds hanging in the society's exhibition hall with their paint cracking and gilt frames peeling, are a reminder of the callous ness and indifference one generation can exhibit for the careful time consuming acquisitions of another. Worse is the state of Indian antiquity: valuable Quran copies and religious scriptures have been crudely pasted together with tape, disappearing gold coins have probably been melted down and ancient inscriptions are being flogged in foreign markets. The Asiatic Society may be declared an institution of national importance, but unless that importance is manifested in its preservation, its future appears as bleak as any other national storehouse.

—SUNIL SETHI in Calcutta

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KARNATAKA

Crumbling Court



T.L. RAMASWAMY

The high court building: shaky edifice

THE SETTING is ironic to say the very least. This month the Karnataka High Court will be sitting in judgement to decide the fate of its own 116-year-old building, popularly known as the Attara Cutcherry. What makes the case all the more interesting is that the judges had themselves asked the Government to give them a new building on the plea that the imposing Greco-Roman structure, which has housed the court in Bangalore since 1956, is unsafe.

In early December, a group of concerned citizens filed a suit against the state of Karnataka, the state Director of Archaeology and the Bangalore Urban Arts Commission, seeking the preservation of the building as a historical monument. Forty advocates have impleaded themselves in the case against the petitioners, comprising 14 citizens, including scientists, filmstars, businessmen and city elders.

On May 5 last year, the state Government had announced that the brick-red monument (with a plinth area of 1.2 lakh sq ft) was to be pulled down. The order was in concurrence with an earlier decision by the Gundu Rao government. The Government also okayed a Public Works Department plan to replace it with a new three-storey edifice (with a plinth area of 4.64 lakh sq ft) using the same facade. Estimated to cost Rs 11 crore, the projected building will provide more space. With as many as 1.25 lakh cases pending, the high court needs 40 court halls but is at present making do with just 18.

Voluble Opposition: The Government decision was immediately met with a volley of criticism. At a meeting on April 10, 1983, a number of prominent citizens in Bangalore resolved that the cutcherry should not be demolished. They held that the building should be declared a protected monument and after repairs, be used as a museum. The court should be shifted to a new site in Bangalore.

Their arguments are that the building represents an archaeological style of a bygone era and is a concrete link with the past. Even the name harks back to the central secretariat established by Chikkadevaraya of Mysore, consisting of 18 cutcherries.

The building has over the past century housed all the three wings of government—the state legislature, the executive and now the judiciary. The petitioners claim that the Karnataka Monuments Act provides for preservation of such buildings. Already, 685 buildings have been declared ancient monuments under its provisions.

The petitioners are buttressing their arguments with a resolution of the Bangalore Urban Arts Commission, which holds that the building should be preserved and put to alternative use. They also say that the proposed expenditure of Rs 11 crore on demolition and reconstruction is wasteful and that, in any case, it is the responsibility of the Centre.

Expert Study: In deference to public pressure and the resolution of the urban arts commission, which is a statutory body, the Government invited M. Achyuta Rao, an engineer on the United Nations roster of experts, to study the building. Rao held that the building would remain stable for several decades if certain repairs were effected. He estimated that these would cost about Rs 1.75 crore. The state Government has asked the Finance Commission for a special grant for the reconstruction. It feels that the new building would be useful if the Central move to open a southern bench of the Supreme Court in Bangalore works out.

However, according to government sources, judges were reluctant to continue in the building after heavy water seepage in September. The judges, apparently, were also shaken by the collapse of the Ganga... high-rise building in early September, in which 120 people were killed. Two persons were similarly killed last year when the ... geological survey building caved in.

The entire north wing of the cutcherry has already been vacated and the occupants moved to the nearby insurance department building. The wing is in a sorry state with perceptible tilt in the corridors. At various points, the ceiling is supported by rust-stained steel posts. A fire in the south wing on July 27, 1977, caused so much damage that a reinforced cement concrete roof was installed in this wing. Therefore, this wing is now considered safe.

Callous Neglect: According to retired court employees, neglect, carelessness and sheer lack of regard for the building have led to the present crisis. Cracks in the ceiling apart, insufficient drainage and clogging of water ducts have added to the problem.

Perturbed by the condition of the building, a group of architecture students from a local engineering college recently entered a project report on the preservation of the cutcherry in a national competition on conservation. In their report, they identified areas of the building that need attention and suggested alternative uses for it.

The building was built between 1864 and 1868 at a cost of Rs 4.5 lakh by the British. Various public offices, including the Dewan's establishment, have functioned from the cutcherry since then. When the Vidhana Soudha was completed in 1956, the High Court moved in. Both the Assembly and the Council have also functioned from here. But what will happen here in the future now hangs in the figurative balance.

—K. BHANUMATHY

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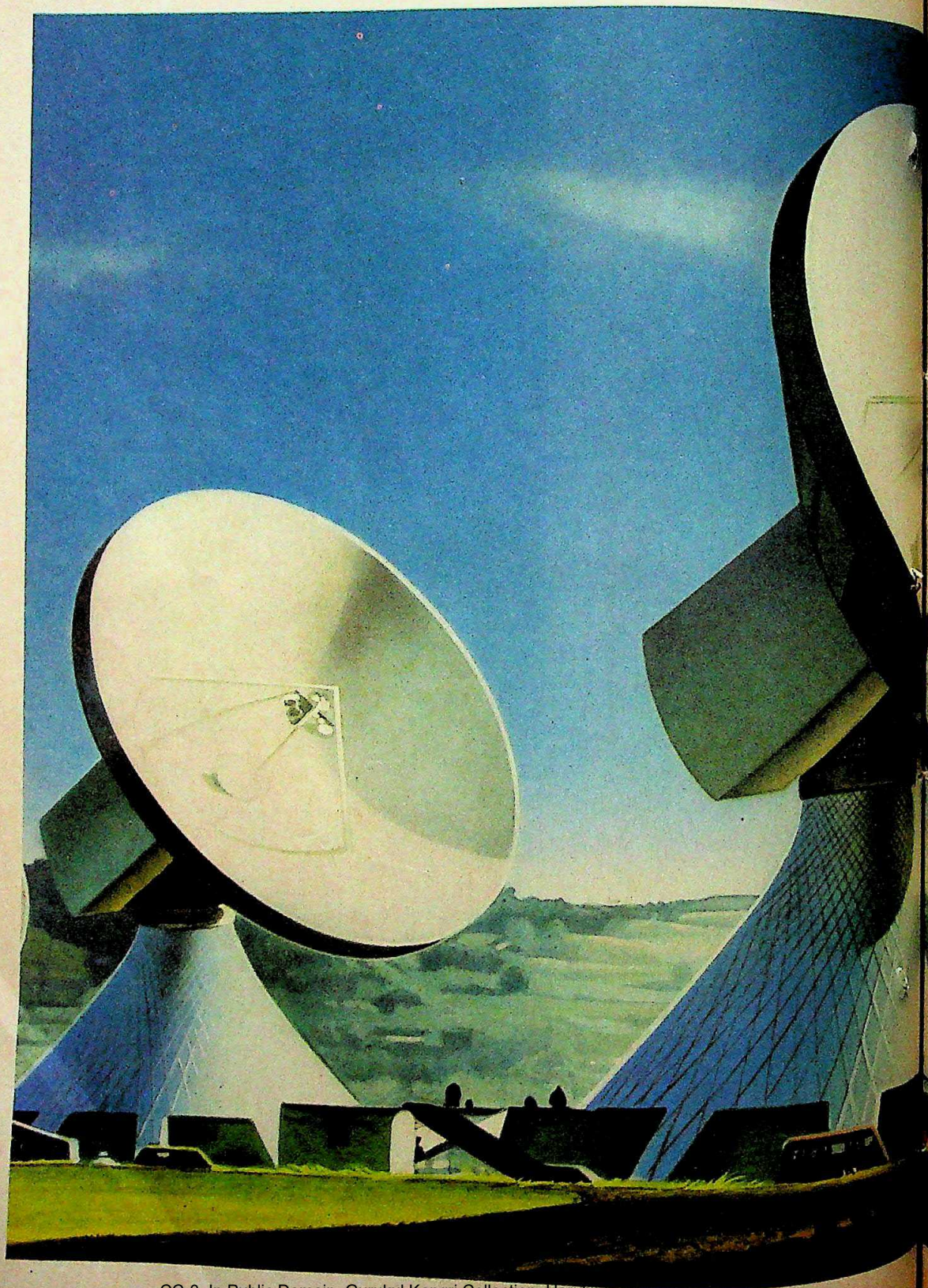
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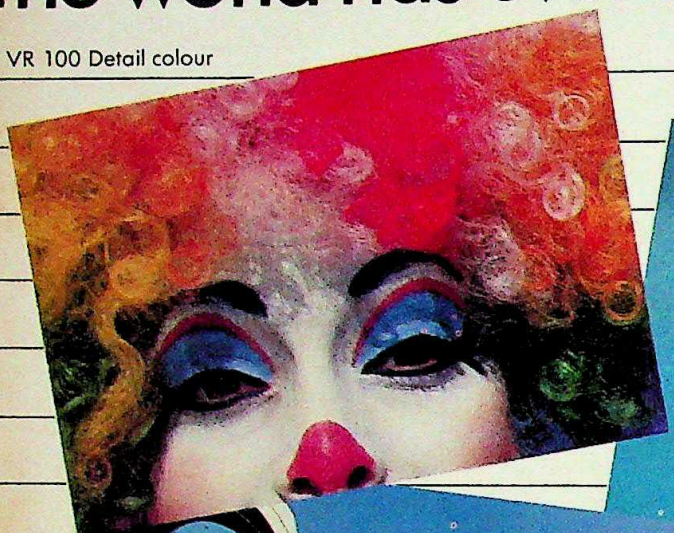
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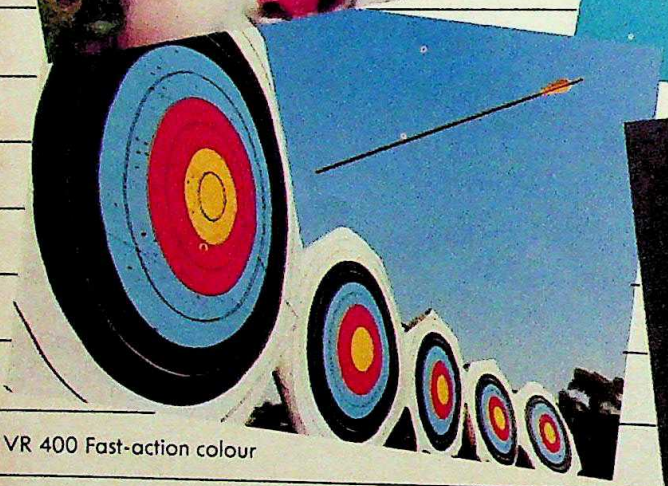
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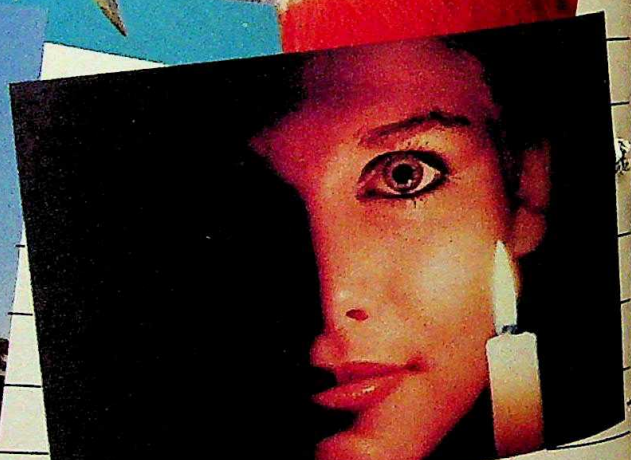


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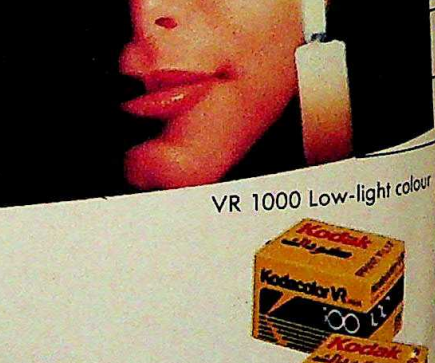
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Erogenous Zones

PARO: DREAMS OF PASSION
by NAMITA GOKHALE
Chatto & Windus
Price: £7.95; Pages: 160

THERE are certain books that bring forth the voyeur in certain readers, predominantly because the characters and situations are so easily and vicariously identifiable. *Paro*, Namita Gokhale's literary debut, is the perfect example. For those familiarly entrenched in Delhi's jealously-guarded social circles, *Paro* is peppered with the kind of people and predilections that they encounter almost every evening. The rapacious and coldly calculating unmarried socialites stalking prospective providers through the city's social jungles; the rich businessmen with one eye on commercial contacts and the other down the bosom of their latest secretary; the long-haired kurta-clad Marxists spouting revolutionary slogans and living in capitalistic comfort; the obscenely ugly political fat cats spitting cigars in the cutglass and exuding the heady aphrodisiac of power; the scions of royal families bumbling bewilderedly through an age unsuited to their upbringing.

That clearly is the book's greatest asset, the perception with which the author has fleshed out her characters to transform them into real-life people rather than puppets responding to the writer's mental adjustments. Apart from that, the book is nothing more than Paro's racy romp through the bedrooms of Delhi's posh colonies, devouring, destroying and discarding men with gay and lascivious abandon in search of her particular unholy grail. Judged purely on literary merit, *Paro* is rather like a Mills and Boon novel rewritten by Jacqueline Susann and set in 20th century Delhi's fast lane.

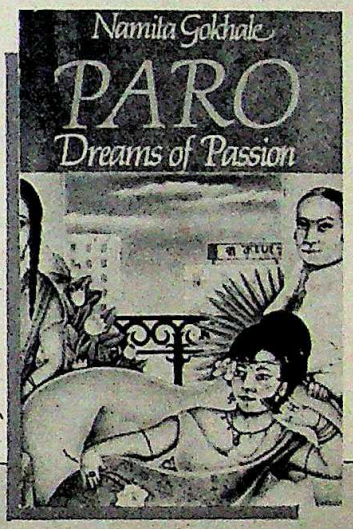
In more Indianised terms, it's a sort of poor man's *Karma Cola* (which brought author Gita Mehta instant celebrity not so long ago). Gokhale is clearly no Gita Mehta. She has the writer's inner eye which sees beyond the artificialities and records the subtle real-life nuances to be later transcribed into print. In *Paro*, she uses the clever medium of writing the book as a secret diary kept by Priya who follows trance-like in Paro's turbulent wake, carefully observing her sexual conquests, her vulgarity, her descent from the social mountaintop to the filth-encrusted sabzi mandis. The love-hate relationship between Paro and Priya forms the spine of the story. The other characters form the flesh but there is literally too much of the flesh and too little of the spine.

Despite all the drawbacks, *Paro* is a highly entertaining novel, a breezily written social comedy that captures all the whorls and flourishes of Delhi's cocktail circles with unnerving accuracy. Priya, the voyeuristic diarist, is the typical middle class woman who marries a professional on the make and is dragged dazedly up the social escalator shedding her inhibitions but remaining uncomfortable with the new social and sexual mores her nouveau riche life entraps her in. Then there is Priya's ex-boss, B.R., the business magnate rampaging through the pages like a stud bull till he meets and mates with the love-bitch, Paro the eternal temptress. 'Lenin' the Marxist, son of a cabinet minister, who "uses his Marxism like a cheap mantra" and is in turn used and discarded by Paro. "Bucky" Bhandpur, princely scion and eternal sucker trailing in Paro's footsteps like a faithful and pedigreed puppy. Shambu Nath Mishra, the oily and obese Congress luminary in whom Paro finally meeds her match. "He is so ugly, so repulsive that he makes me feel beautiful."

All these characters make up Paro's "demonic circle", a whirling merry-go-round that spins faster and faster until literary gravity is defeated with inevitable results. Gokhale's advantage is her background, both social and professional. As daughter-in-law of former law minister H.R. Gokhale, and long-time Delhi resident, she must have met and studied hundreds of Shambu Nath Mishras, Lenins and Paros. Her professional capacity as editor of *Super* magazine for a number of years has certainly done her literary style no harm. Yet, *Paro* gives the appearance of having been written in a hurry as if the writer already had a mental picture of the book and wanted to finish before the memories faded. It jumps from one scene to another and one bed to another with dizzying rapidity like an LP revolving at 45 rpm.

But the saving grace is Paro herself. Gokhale has drawn her to near perfection, the brittle woman of the world, sensual and silly, crude and calculating, grasping and generous who uses her knowledge of the male psyche to hideous advantage. "Look sweetie," she once lectures Priya, "they made the rules." As pure entertainment, *Paro*, like the story's protagonist, gives full value for money. But at the end, the final effect is like waking up in the morning after a bacchanalian night to the smell of sweaty sex, soggy canapes and unfinished whiskies.

—DILIP BOBB



EXTRACTS

"SEX HAD become to him more than a sport, it was a duty, a vocation, a calling. I sensed that it was with sex alone that he reached out to the world, and it was with sex that he shut out thought, emotion and feeling. Women could, perhaps, sense this immense sexual generosity and came to him for succour and healing. And he allowed himself to be used as a lamppost, or as a letter-box for women to send messages to their husbands through. I do not think he ever refused a woman; it was as though he were bound, by his code of honour, to ravish every female he encountered..."

"PARO was a child of privilege. I couldn't remember her ever passionately wanting anything; she took the luxury and adulation that surrounded her for granted, as part of the perks. But now, with a despondent Lenin by her side, she had her first experience of deprivation, of the indignities of need. She didn't know about queues, and ration cards, and bus-routes; and I don't think she ever tried to learn; she only shut out that world, slugging down gin after gin and surviving in stubborn hope..."

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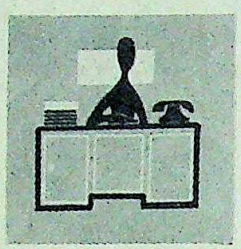
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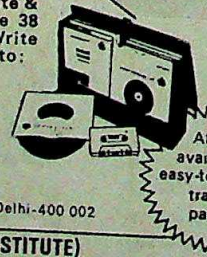
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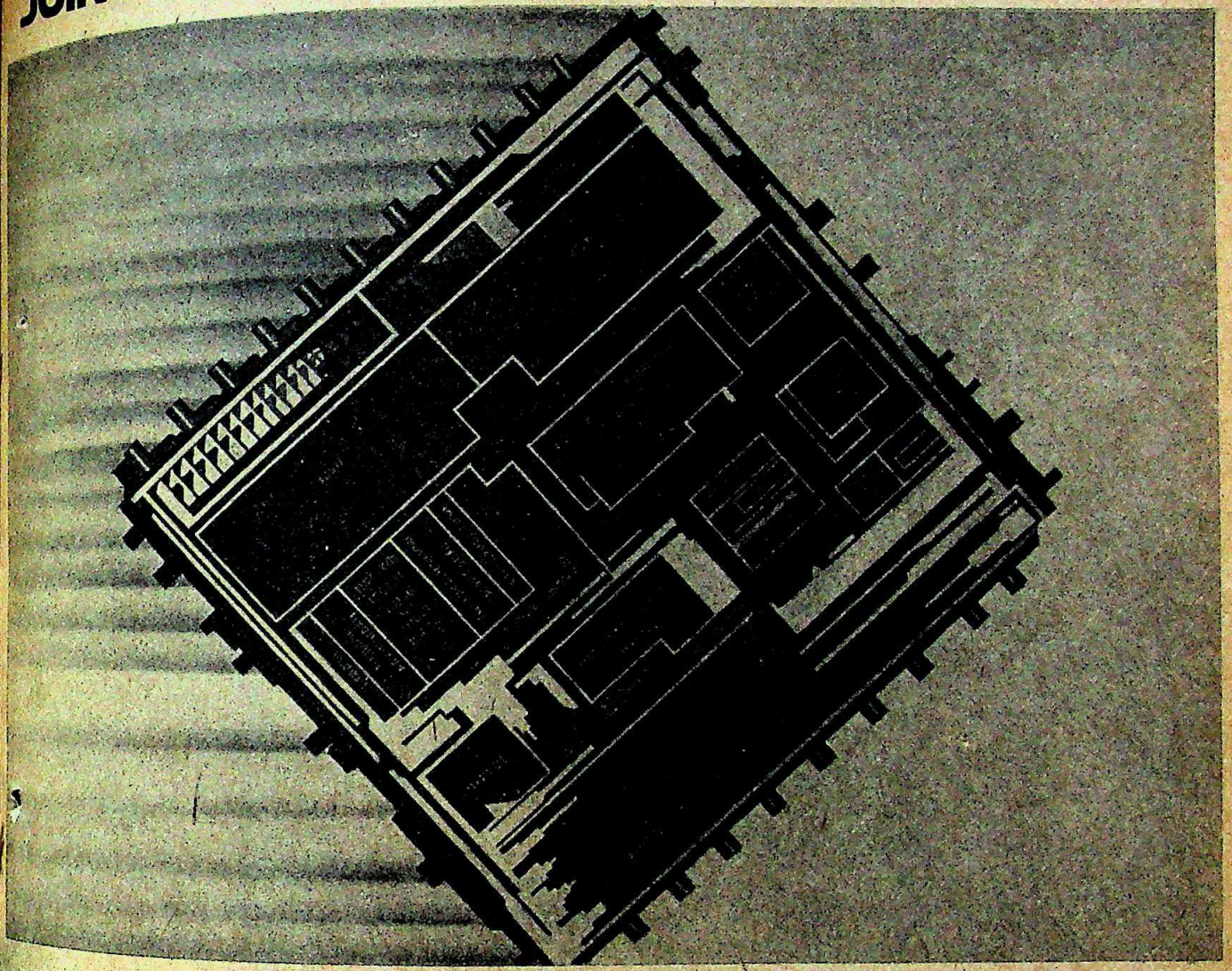
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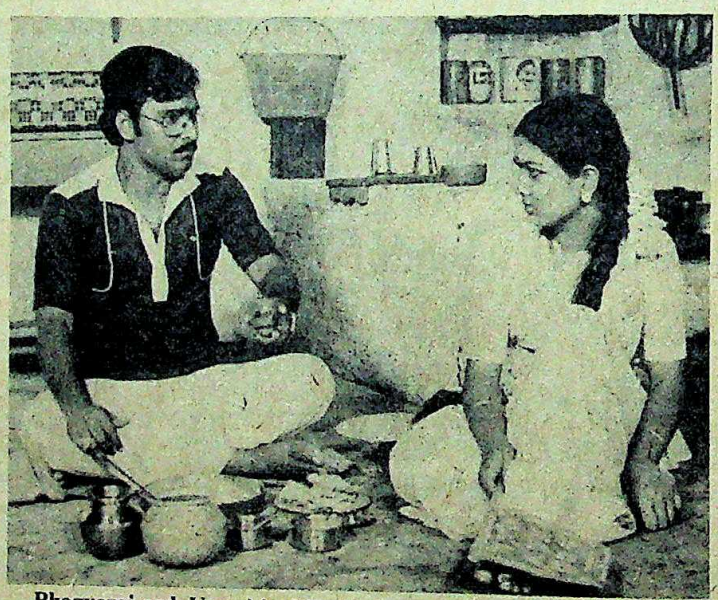
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K. BHAGYARAJ

Box-office Baron

A DRUMSTICK is not a particularly exciting vegetable. In fact, it can be quite tasteless unless cooked with the right spices in the right combinations. All over the south, however, drumstick sales are booming. Why? Because of an onscreen romance where a village maid snares a widower schoolteacher into marrying her and then finds that she can't make him take her to bed. The frustrated wife is in a bind until somebody tells her that drumstick is an aphrodisiac so she feeds her recalcitrant man curries oozing drumsticks at every pore. The husband and wife go to bed, where the man squirms, writhes and wriggles, and the audience roars and roars and roars with laughter. And goes out and buys drumsticks.

The onscreen romance is called *Munthane Mudichu*. For those who don't think much of either drumsticks or village comedies or frigid schoolteachers, here are some statistics: made by AVM at a cost of Rs 30 lakh, it is expected to net Rs 4 crore, a new southern box-office record. It is the first film to run for 25 weeks in four Madras theatres and 10 other centres all over the south; the first Tamil film to celebrate its silver jubilee in Trivandrum. Its Hindi remake rights were sold for Rs 5 lakh, the highest ever paid for a remake. In short, *Munthane Mudichu* is a boisterous, rollicking hit.



Bhagyaraj and Urvasi in *Munthane Mudichu*: breaking records

Superstar Status: There is only one property hotter than *Munthane Mudichu* and that is its hero, writer and director, the embarrassed husband struggling in the clutches of his eager wife. K. Bhagyaraj, eyes peering quizzically through spectacles, short and dark, is an unlikely hero and an unlikelier candidate for the golden touch. No appearance could be more misleading: at 31, a decade after he ran away from home to plough his own furrow in the brawling world of Madras films, and nine films in the can later, Bhagyaraj is the reigning king of Kodambakkam, the Madras film Hollywood. At a time when the video threat is looming larger than ever, when not even Amitabh Bachchan or Kamalahasan can guarantee box-office success, Bhagyaraj draws offers such as the Rs 30 lakh made by one of the biggest producers in the south; the highest before that was the Rs 15 lakh reportedly paid to N.T. Rama Rao for his *Bobili Puli*. At a time when a Rajnikant or a Kamalahasan film is taken by distributors for Rs 40 lakh, Bhagyaraj has sold his forthcoming *Dhavani Kanavukal*, his first as producer, for an incredible Rs 1.36 crore before he has even finalised the script or chosen the cast.

Bhagyaraj does not command the overpowering presence of a Sivaji Ganesan or the thrilling bombast of a Rajnikant. At 5 ft 5 inches, he has to look up to some of his leading ladies. He is neither handsome nor strikingly ugly. He is, in fact, just like the millions of men who flock to the theatres—a typical south Indian, with typical south Indian chatter, his finger constantly squeezing the funny-bone of his audience. Rival Kamalahasan says: "Of all the actors working now, Bhagyaraj is the one who has the most instant rapport with the audience." Dasari Narayana Rao, one of the most successful directors in the south, adds: "A lot of people try to tell the truth and make it funny but no one else is so accurate and compassionate as Bhagyaraj. All fall before his humour."

Professional Attitude: In tandem with the creator works an artist with an uncanny knack of knowing exactly what the audience wants, a relentless professional who works out every shot and practical joke of the film looking to the minutiae of entertainment with an eye that never seems to falter. Says AVM's Saravanan, the producer of *Munthane Mudichu*: "He took two months to write the script. He had everything planned out to the last-minute costume change." After the film was completed, reminisces Saravanan, Bhagyaraj locked himself with his editor "with a staple gun and a pair of scissors stitched all this material together".

Writing, acting, directing, editing... wonder Bhagyaraj is called a one-man industry. Producer K.Balaji, who has asking him for months to make a film him, says: "Bhagyaraj is a gold-mine. He only writes his own script but directs and in them making it very easy for the pro cers." However, the superstar knows h pace himself. He does only one film at and has only two releases a year. Pro currently waiting to sign him up have told that the earliest free dates are in

Bhagyaraj himself says he always special attention to the story and the ment. Unless the script is not ready, he not start shooting. The dialogues are al written on the sets and unfailingly flow irresistible colloquial flav Bhagyaraj's mentor Bharat observes: "His power of ob vation and his ability to re what he sees with satirical have made him a box-offic zard." Bhagyaraj admits learned the craft from Bha raja. It was he who taught that great scripts don't drop of the sky; you have to cr them."

Bharatiraja and B raj: the combination is as the one that took the Indian film industry by scruff of its neck and forced look at new ideas and new pe ple. As director-camerama Balu Mahendra puts it: " Steven Spielberg and Geo Lucas did to Hollywood in late '70s Bharatiraja and gyaraj did to the Kodam kam film industry during the same pe —they changed movie making in the sou Many feel that the pair broke the myth only goodlookers could become stars: th also taught the importance of a good scr In addition, they gave breaks to half-a-do new faces who later made it big—Bhagy has acted with fresh heroines in each nine films.

Bhagyaraj came to know Bharat when he was wandering around Ma trying to get into films. The bug had gri him much earlier: at home in Coimbatore organised MGR fan clubs—"At the table, while eating lunch or dinner, I used say dialogues from MGR films"—and d med of Madras. His father was a small automotive parts dealer and his mother conservative housewife who hated film After his father died, Bhagyaraj stopp

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going to college, and some months later ran away to Madras. Looking back on those years, he says: "During those days only chocolate-faced, fair men could become heroes. I still remember producers sniggering and smirking at me." Bhagyaraj managed to become the assistant to a director making his first film: Bharatiraja.

Successful Sequence: With two virtually unknown actors called Kamalahasan and Sridevi, Bharatiraja made *16 Vayathile* later remade in Hindi as *Solva Sawan*. It was Bhagyaraj's first screenplay. He wrote the script for three more films by Bharatiraja, including the very successful *Sigappu Rojakkal*—*Red Rose* in the Hindi version—where he played his first role, a waiter who is stranded by a maniacal Kamalahasan. Says Bhagyaraj: "Since I was the assistant director I could always be there on the sets. So not to have any continuity problem I acted in small roles in Bharatiraja films."

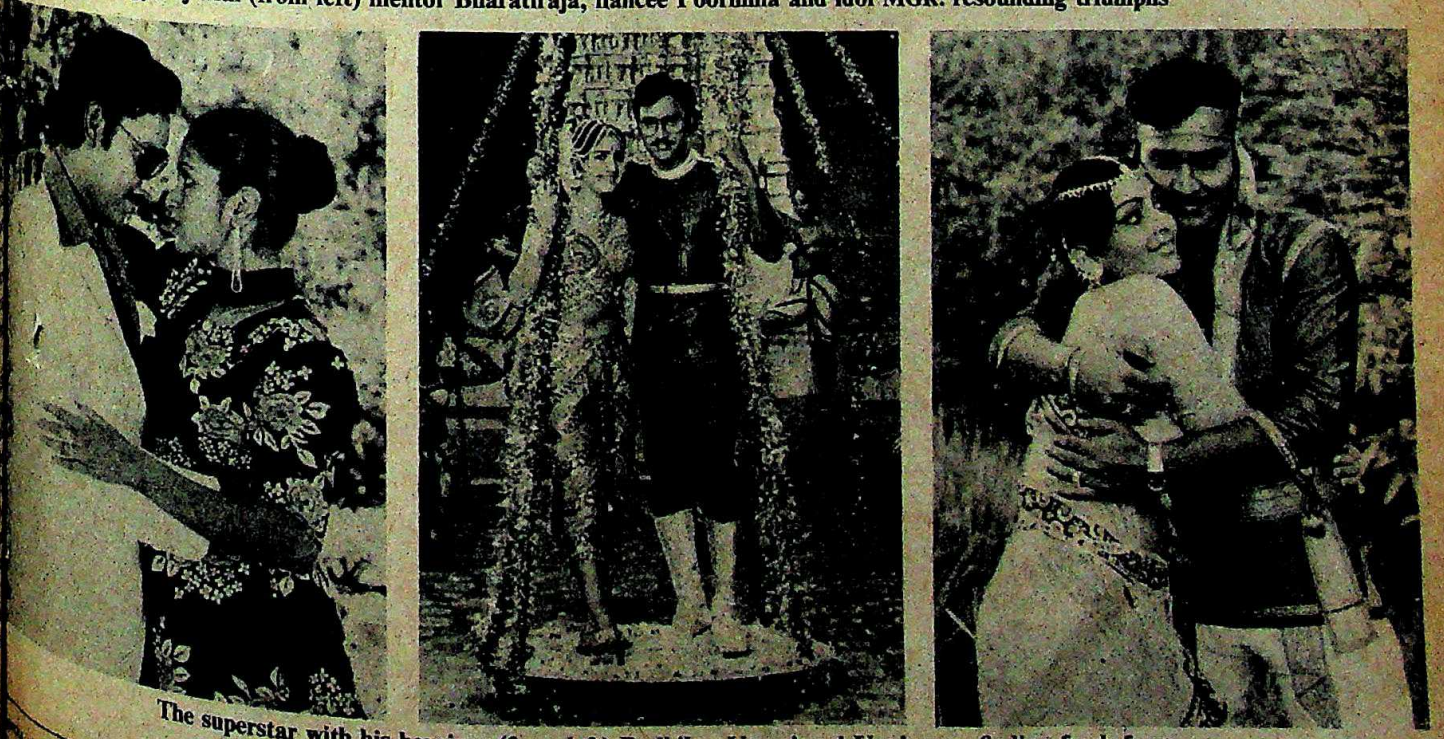
A few months later, the ordinary-looking college drop-out from Coimbatore was the hero in *Puthiya Vaarpugal*, with a new heroine called Rati Agnihotri. As Bharatiraja tells it: "I was looking for a new hero since Kamalahasan was too busy. Till the day before the shooting schedule, I did not find the right face. Next day I made my assistant Bhagyaraj the hero. The rest is history."

Unfortunately, *Puthiya Vaarpugal* was the last of the Bharatiraja-Bhagyaraj creations. Bhagyaraj directed his first film *Chuvarillatha Chitrangal*, a moderate hit. But it was his *Mouna Geethangal*—remade in Hindi as *Ek Hi Bhool*—that established his superstar status. From then on, every movie he made was a bigger hit than the last. *Antha Ezhu Nalugal*, for instance, was a super success and, inevitably, the Bombay industry copied it as *Woh Saat Din*. *Munthane Mudichu* is his ninth directorial venture in six years. This May, Bhagyaraj will direct his first Hindi film *Masterji*, a remake of *Munthane Mudichu* which will have Amitabh Bachchan in the title role.

Key Roles: Success has a way of rubbing off on others and quite a few of those who played in Bhagyaraj's films have gone on to greater things. Urvasi, the heroine of *Munthane Mudichu*, is receiving offers right and left. Chitty Babu, 13, the handicapped boy who played the village urchin Thavakalai in the same film now has about 50 films in a number of languages. Chitty Babu has since changed his name to Thavakalai, which means 'frog'; says he: "Bhagyaraj is my god. I was living in abject poverty and due to my physical deformities I would never have made it. But he picked me regardless of my looks and literally transformed a frog into a



Bhagyaraj with (from left) mentor Bharatiraja, fiancee Poornima and idol MGR: resounding triumphs



The superstar with his heroines (from left) Radhika, Urvasi and Unnimary: finding fresh faces

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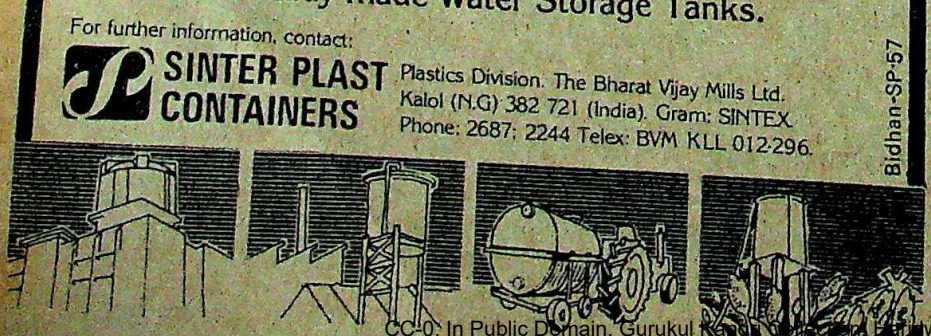
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prince, as in fairy-tales." As Bhagyaraj ... "I look for characters, not stars, to fi... my script. And there is nothing more ex... than finding a new face who is exactly ... for an important role."

But success has not been witho... dark clouds. Two months after the rele... *Munthane Mudichu*, Bhagyaraj became ... dower when his wife Praveena, who ... married early in his career, died of jau... Says he: "It was she who got me to th... Without her advice and help I would ... have reached such dizzy heights." H... marry Poornima Jayaram, his hero... *Darling, Darling, Darling*. As the a... director admits: "After the death of my ... wife and at the pinnacle of my car... became isolated and lonely. Today I ne... wife urgently otherwise I will go to sc... reens."

Expert Advice: The one great influ... on Bhagyaraj's life and career has ... MGR. In every Bhagyaraj film there ... least one reference or a picture of the ... minister. In *Munthane Mudichu* one ... picturised MGR's midday meal sch... MGR is shown a preview of all his mo... Says Bhagyaraj: "MGR knows the psy... logy of the masses. I try to make use of ... tain techniques of his that have made ... popular with the masses. It was MGR ... insisted that I have fight scenes in my ... He said that the masses would unde... only if the good guy bashes the bad guy ... last reel."

In *Darling, Darling, Darling* M... wanted a climax fight, which Bhagyaraj ... tely refused to incorporate; the result ... that the film didn't do as well as the oth... Now every Bhagyaraj film carries a ... fight, an inspiration from the early MG... films. And Bhagyaraj keeps physically ... just like the legendary hero. But he does ... intend to join MGR's party and in fact ... no political ambitions. However, as a T... paper wrote in a significant comm... "Bhagyaraj has become MGR's propag... machinery."

It is clear that, if Bhagyaraj wants ... get into politics, the infrastructure is alr... there. There are about 1,500 Bhagyaraj ... associations spread out all over the state. ... Palani Swamy, president of the Bhag... Fans Association, says: "We are a non-p... tical service organisation. In most of the ... lages of Tamil Nadu Bhagyaraj has become ... household name due to our social servi... But the superstar repeatedly insists that ... has absolutely no intention of making ... career in politics. "One of my main ... still," asserts the hero from *Kodambakk...* who has made drumstick sales soar, "... make people laugh, and that will prob... never change."

—SREEDHAR PI...

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OOTBALL

Star Show

THE GOAL will be talked about for a long time. Laszlo Kiss of Hungary received a diagonal pass on the half-. He lunged forward, feinting to beat the inese defence, and finally got to within ots of the goal. Here he found stopper ogeng racing in, so he swerved left and ched the right elbow of the Chinese box. owerful left-footer smashed into the net, ving the Chinese defence frozen in disbelief.

The Hungarian striker's goal was easily high point of the third Nehru Gold Cup ational Soccer Tournament, which ended Calcutta last fortnight when Poland beat na 1-0 in a classic Euro-Asian encounter the Salt Lake Stadium to lift the trophy. na finished runners-up for the third suc-ssive time. Favourites Argentina almost ade it to the finals but were nudged out by na on the basis of better goal average, en the Chinese netted three goals against Indian team which appeared to have had stuffing knocked out of it.

Despite India's disappointing rformance—they earned only one point m five matches, when their joust with mania ended in a draw—the football fans soccer-crazy Calcutta must have been tisfied with the feast laid out for them organisers. On display were a Polish n with no less than six World Cuppers, a look Argentinian squad of which coach los Bilardi said, "I am sure half the side be in the country's first eleven," and dark e China, who proved conclusively that y had the skill, speed and stamina to finish finalists for the third time in as many ers. Holders Hungary had also brought ng a new team, as had Romania.

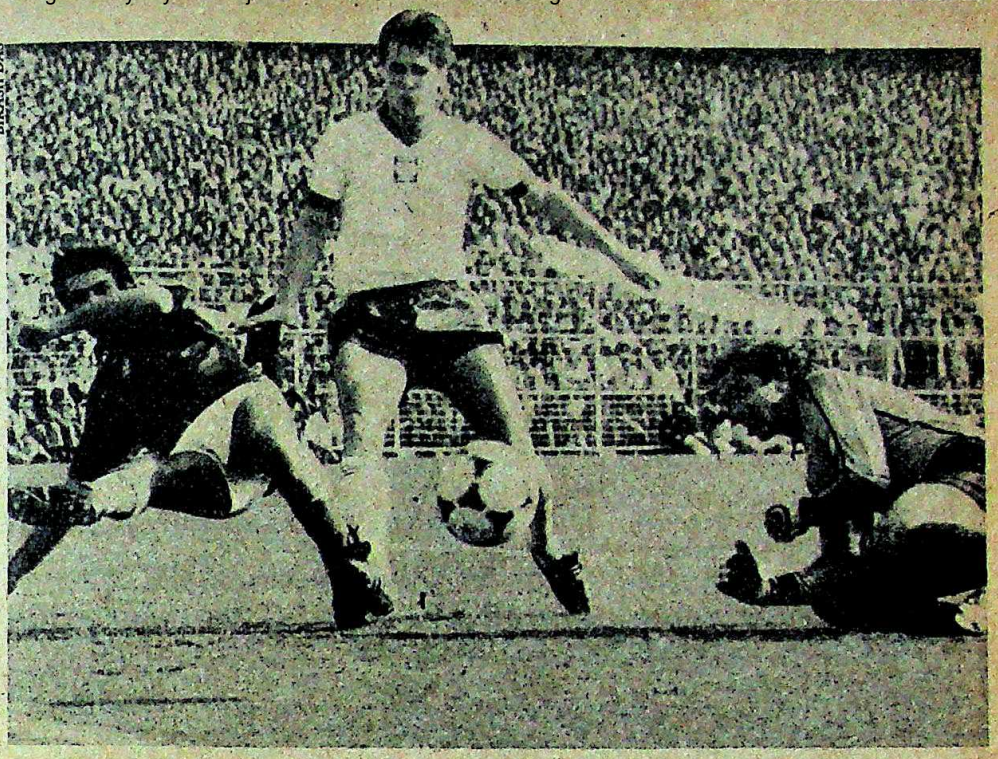
Team Play: If Kiss was the kingpin of Hungarian side, for champions Poland it s undoubtedly their bearded forward olarek, who master-minded and built up Polish attack and, with a superb sense of m play, very often stayed away from ring, leaving that crucial task to less ely marked colleagues.

The clean, sharp play of the Europeans in contrast to that of the Indians, who n out the same old story of missed nces, poor finishing and lack of stamina. r having played well against Argentina Hungary, restricting them to one-goal tories, they completely disappointed gainst the Chinese, when they conceded as ey as three goals in the last match. The nese, on the other hand, were brilliant th their short passes and bursts of speed. wonder that Bilardo said after Argentina t to China by a solitary goal in a round-robin match: "They had a completely different style of play compared to ours and we were caught on the wrong foot."

The organisers spent over Rs 4 crore on the tournament, nearly half of this in foreign exchange: they were willing to pay fees as high as $20,000 (Rs 2 lakh) per match. Although this must have made a large hole in their pockets, and although Indian coach Ciric Milovan of Yugoslavia felt that holding a high-profile tournament was not the best thing for a country which was not strong in the game, there was no doubt that the star-studded jamboree which concluded in a roar of cheers last fortnight was worth watching for every shot that rocketed off the boots of Kiss, Smolarek and Co.

— NARAYAN OJHA

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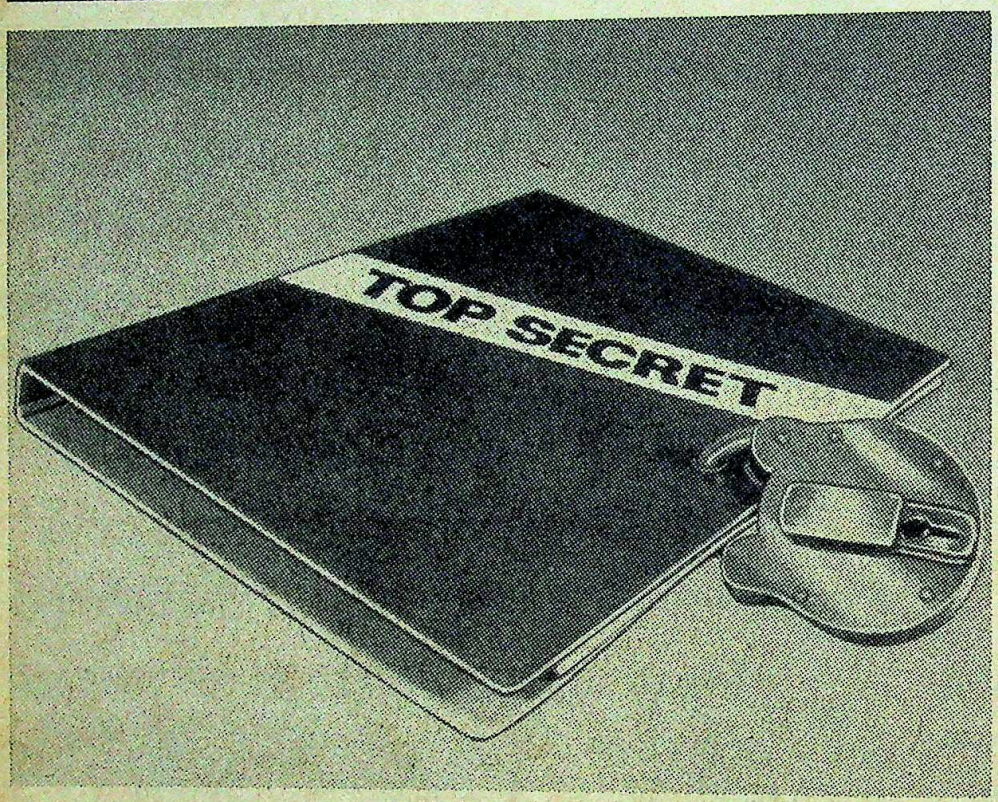


Hungary vs Poland (top) and China vs Argentina: a feast for fans

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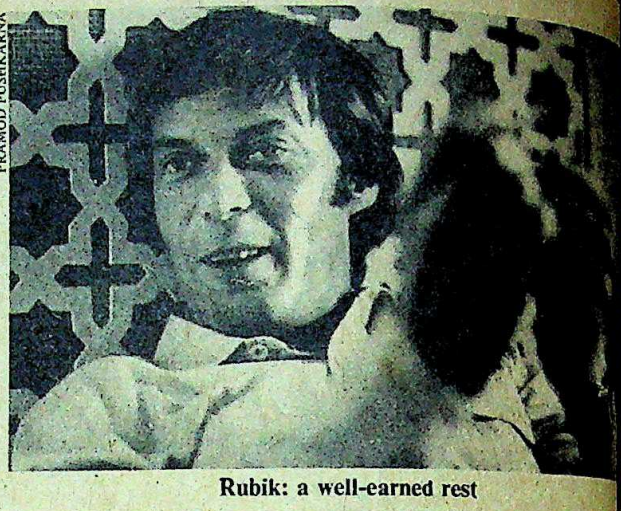


PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Hebbar and Mrs Gandhi (right): a model sitter

"She is an excellent sitter, absolutely steady and extremely patient. Normally, even I can't stand that much patience and steadiness." That is artist and Lalit Kala Akademi Chairman **K.K. Hebbar** talking about his latest subject—Prime Minister **Indira Gandhi**. The well-known painter has been commissioned to do a portrait of the prime minister at the request of the director of Delhi's National Museum. Every morning, Mrs Gandhi arrives at the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi and proceeds to a first floor room where the portrait is being painted. She usually gives Hebbar an hour's sitting before resuming her frenetic public schedule. But its purpose and eventual destination are being kept a close secret. "I don't know where it is going to be placed," shrugs Hebbar. He expects the portrait to be completed by the end of February and only requires a couple of sittings before he starts work on the finishing touches.

■ *If downbeat*, that bible of Jazz aficionados, saw fit to send its managing editor in person, it must have been some musical event. And so it was. The Jazz Yatra has now become a permanent fixture on the Indian musical scene and every year it gets better and better. The colourful musical carnival hit Bombay and Delhi for a month-long tour de force which ended, rather regretfully, last week, but left behind musical memories that will linger long in the winter air. **Don Cherry**, the black American jazz great improvising on a pocket Pakistani trumpet, all-time jazz giant **Woody Shaw** and **Ronnie Scot**, the flamboyantly colourful **Henry Threadgill Sextet** and the Swedish big band sound of the **Bitter Funeral Beer Band**. But the show was unexpectedly stolen by a jazz band **Allegro** from the Soviet Union whose foot-stomping beat and abandoned improvisation proved that back in the USSR jazz is alive and well.



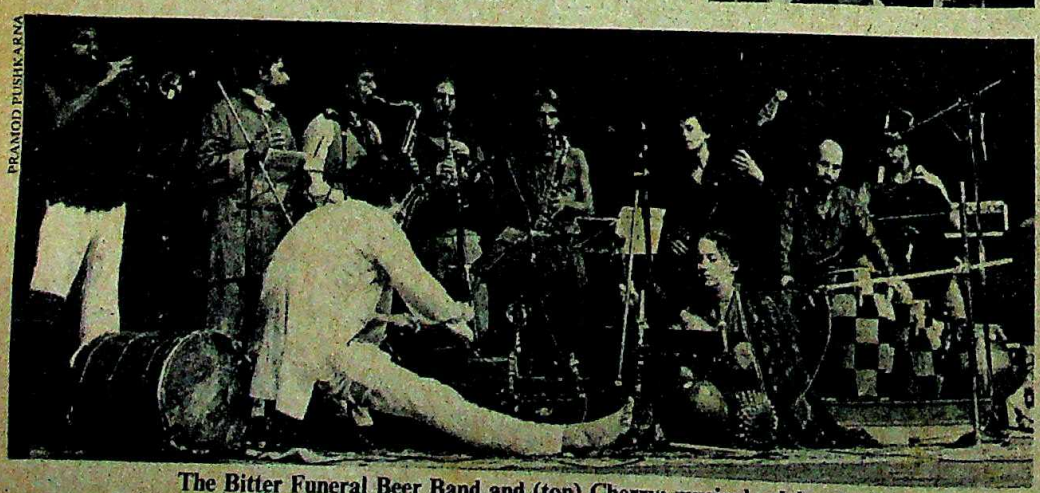
PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Rubik: a well-earned rest

■ He is currently the most famous cubist alive though **Erno Rubik** is a name that wouldn't figure in the Louvre. He is, of course, no painter but the man who exasperated millions by his now legendary Rubik's Cube became an instant millionaire in the process. Rubik was in India last fortnight soaking up the sun and giving his inventive talents a well-earned rest. Since 1974, when he first marketed the cube, it is still selling at an astonishing rate. In 1980, its world-wi sales were 5 million pieces and year later its sales graph h shot up to 21 million cub Estimated sales for last year a in the region of 100 million. B as Rubik ruefully points out, per cent are imitations. Fa and fortune, however, ha barely affected the Hungar architecture professor and signer. Still a boyish-looking Rubik says his millions ha hardly altered his life. Mea while, the contest to clip world record for solving puzzle in the least possible still continues frenziedly. currently held by a 16-year-Vietnamese American who it in just 22.95 seconds. Ru himself has declined to bid the title. "It is possible to redu the time but not by me," says, "I'm not a competitor only the inventor."



HARSH RAJ



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

The Bitter Funeral Beer Band and (top) Cherry: musical celebration

SIGN POSTS

Died: C.M. Stephen, the general secretary of the India Congress(I) Comm and former Union mi for communications, of attack in Kerala.

Died: Veteran film maker actor Sohrab Modi, 86, in Bo bay, of cancer.

Awarded: The Padma Bhu to Sivaji Ganesan; Dr Ho Alexander; Marie Seton; chael Ferreira, world bili champion, and Vijay Te kar. The Padma Shri to A abh Bachchan; Ben Kings and Adoor Gopala Krishn

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CONTENTS

Voices
Interviews
Cover Story
The Mhatre Murder
Jammu & Kashmir: Tremors of Tension
Current Events
Punjab: Mood of Optimism
Uttar Pradesh: The Sripat Shuffle
Janata Party: Shaken by Strife
Karnataka: Reaping the Whirlwind
Assam: Simmering
Tamil Nadu: Playing on Words
Andhra Pradesh: Congress Hoopla
West Bengal: Rivals Resolve
Bihar: Caste Battle
Madhya Pradesh: Forward March
POW'S: Missing
Bombay: In a Jam
Special Report
Kerala: Brawl on the Beach
Globe-trotting
Fashion: Murjani the Survivor
Archaeology
Arikamedu: Forgotten Heritage
Trade Winds
The Economy
Economic Progress: Running out of Ideas
Business
Industry: Cautious Optimism
Textile Industry: The Looming Crisis
Daitari: Stillborn
Vayudoot: Happy Landings
Cigarettes: The Haldi Way
The Markets: Cautious Course
Kerala: Nutty State
Special Feature
Farming: Triumph in the Terai
Perspective
General Elections: Davids and Goliath
Education
UGC: Learning the Hard Way
Sports
Weightlifting: Stronger Showing
Crime
Calcutta: Power to the People
Lifestyle
Sex Change: Agony and Ecstasy
The Arts
Amjad Ali Khan: Consummate Virtuoso
Balasaraswathi: Curtain Call
Health
Iodine Deficiency: Retarded Development
Medicine
Forensic Science: A Morbid Message
Cinema
A Silent Sonata
Books
National Book Trust: Caught in a Bind
Publishing: Fair Deals
Eye-catchers



Terrorism

The kidnapping and brutal killing of Ravindra Mhatre, an Indian diplomat in Birmingham, UK sent shock waves through India. The incident resurrected the entire Kashmir issue once again. Intertwined with the incident and the growing secessionism in Kashmir was the political future of the Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah.

Cover Story ● Page 18



Kerala

Last month, communal ill feelings surfaced yet again in Kerala, this time in an unlikely trouble spot: the Kovalam Ashok Beach Resort, a half-hour drive from Trivandrum. The bone of contention: an unauthorised mosque built a stone's throw from the resort, and financed by Gulf money. Political pressure, particularly from the RSS and the BJP has added fuel to the fire.

Special Report ● Page 66



Punjab

Last fortnight's state-wide bandh in Punjab ironically laid ground for a fresh round of talks between the Akali leadership and the Centre. After consultations with opposition leaders, Mrs Gandhi extended the invitation, a move that has injected a mood of optimism among the Akalis and is an indication of the softening attitudes of the Centre.

Current Events ● Page 31



Iodine Deficiency

A discovery made by a group of researchers from the capital's All India Institute of Medical Sciences about the consequences of iodine deficiency has startled the medical community. The findings indicate that one out of every 20 children born in 11 populous districts in eastern Uttar Pradesh and northern Bihar is a retardate with no hope of recovery.

Health ● Page 130



Sex Change

Sex change operations, common in the West, have also come to light in India. Although surgical treatment can rectify some cases, there are, however, a large number of people doomed to live a life of blurred sexual identity. A first person report of a man who underwent surgery to become a woman, freeing herself from the shackles of a tormented life.

Lifestyle ● Page 120



Industry

Things are beginning to look up for Indian industry after a two-year slump. Businessmen are becoming more optimistic and looking ahead to better times. But the upbeat mood could be made or marred by what measures the finance minister announces on budget day. A detailed survey of business opinion on the industrial situation.

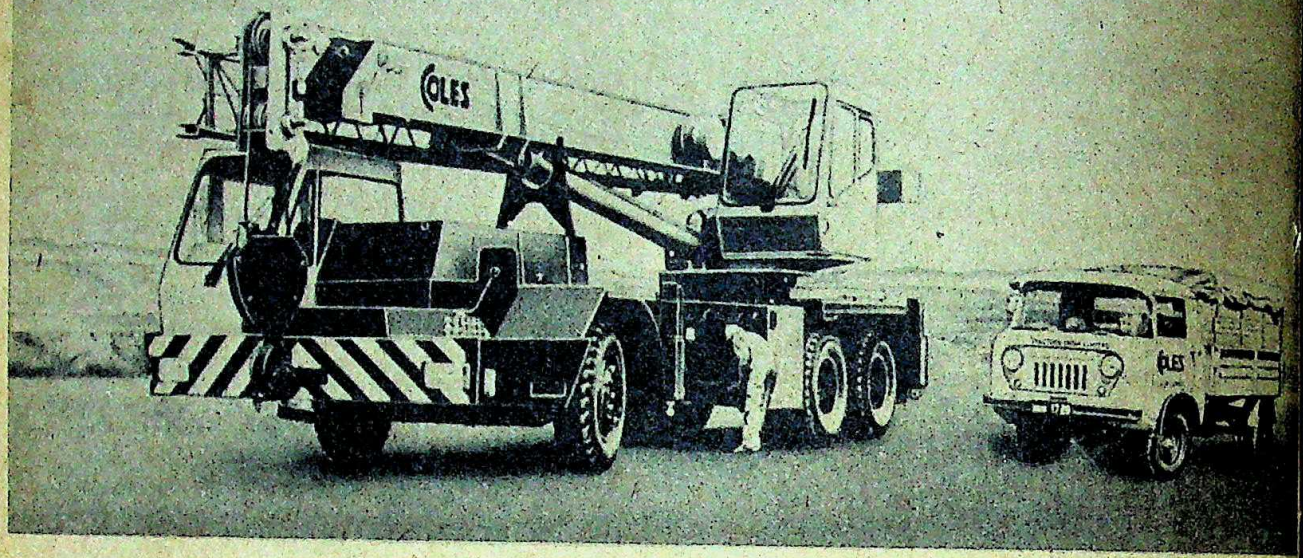
Business ● Page 80

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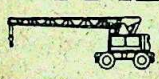


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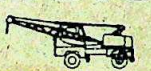
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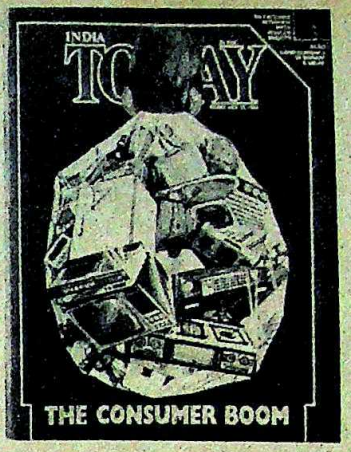
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INDIA TODAY, FEBRUARY 29, 1984

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MATERIAL MATTERS

Your cover story "The Consumer Boom" (February 15) made interesting reading. The article has projected a clear picture giving specific reasons for this unprecedented boom. Undoubtedly "when incomes rise, people will insist on living better".

Dehra Dun — *Ranti Sharma*

■ The consumer boom shows that advertising has come of age in our country. Commercial advertisers have learnt the art of showing a luxury commodity as a basic necessity for an average consumer. It also shows that the people are materialistic.

Madurai — *S. Peter Suresh*

■ Though the market is flooded with all sorts of consumer goods, the common man has not benefited as his purchasing power is declining at an alarming speed. Only in electronic goods has the competition resulted in the slashing of prices to check recession in the market.

Bangalore — *Ramanand Sharma*

■ How can a person who doesn't own a VCR be more civilised than me? So what if 350 million citizens of my country sleep without food each night? At least the Government is providing them the latest models of cars, cameras and other innumerable electronic gadgets to choose from. That half-naked fakir Mahatma Gandhi haunts me. He reminds me of poverty and suffering but there is no suffering—except that last night my colour TV was a bit blurred when *Chitrahaar* was on the air. I will soon remove all his portraits from my wall-to-wall carpeted house. We don't need him. Do we?

Chandigarh — *Ashwani K. Ashu*

■ No mean contributor to the so-called consumer boom, the tendency of ambition and compulsion of most Indians to 'keep up with the Joneses', was I'm afraid ignored in an otherwise well-written article. Also the unholy combination of a gullible public, dishonest producers, unscrupulous advertisers and the virtual non-existence of consumer rights activism in India has resulted in this boom of poor quality goods which leaves the discerning buyer precious little choice.

Bombay — *Jayesh B. Mehta*

■ Although materialistically we have advanced considerably, are we happier than our forefathers? Of what earthly use are these electrical gadgets when we have regressed in honesty, integrity and humanness. There is no use increasing the number of brands or manufacturers of consumer items, when there is a total absence of quality consciousness or a sense of dedication.

Bombay — *K.B. Prithvi Raj*

NAME DROPPING

Jay Dubashi's article on "Economic Newspeak" (February 15) was interesting in as much as he had indulged in the old game of name-dropping. He is the poorer for not reading George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* when it was published. I wonder whether he has read it now. I have seen recent reprints of the book being displayed prominently in the houses of the nouveau riche after the wide coverage given to it in *Time* in December.

Dubashi might have "got the impression that Nehru was not anxious to see him (Orwell)" but at least Nehru had read the book in the year of its publication and he quoted from it in one of his speeches. I was lucky to be introduced to Orwell through Nehru when his speech was reported in the press. Orwell did not however foresee that Big Sister may be watching us in 1984.

Kanpur — *P.V. Nair*

AID AND ADVICE

Your economics editor revels in his own private world of fantasy by claiming that India can do without aid. His economic analysis is as far-fetched as it is jejune. Yes India can do without aid if the following conditions are met: a world where the compulsions of trade protectionism do not operate to India's disadvantage and where the forces of inflation are powerless to erode the currency system.

Madras — *S. Dragoon*

OBSCURE WINNERS

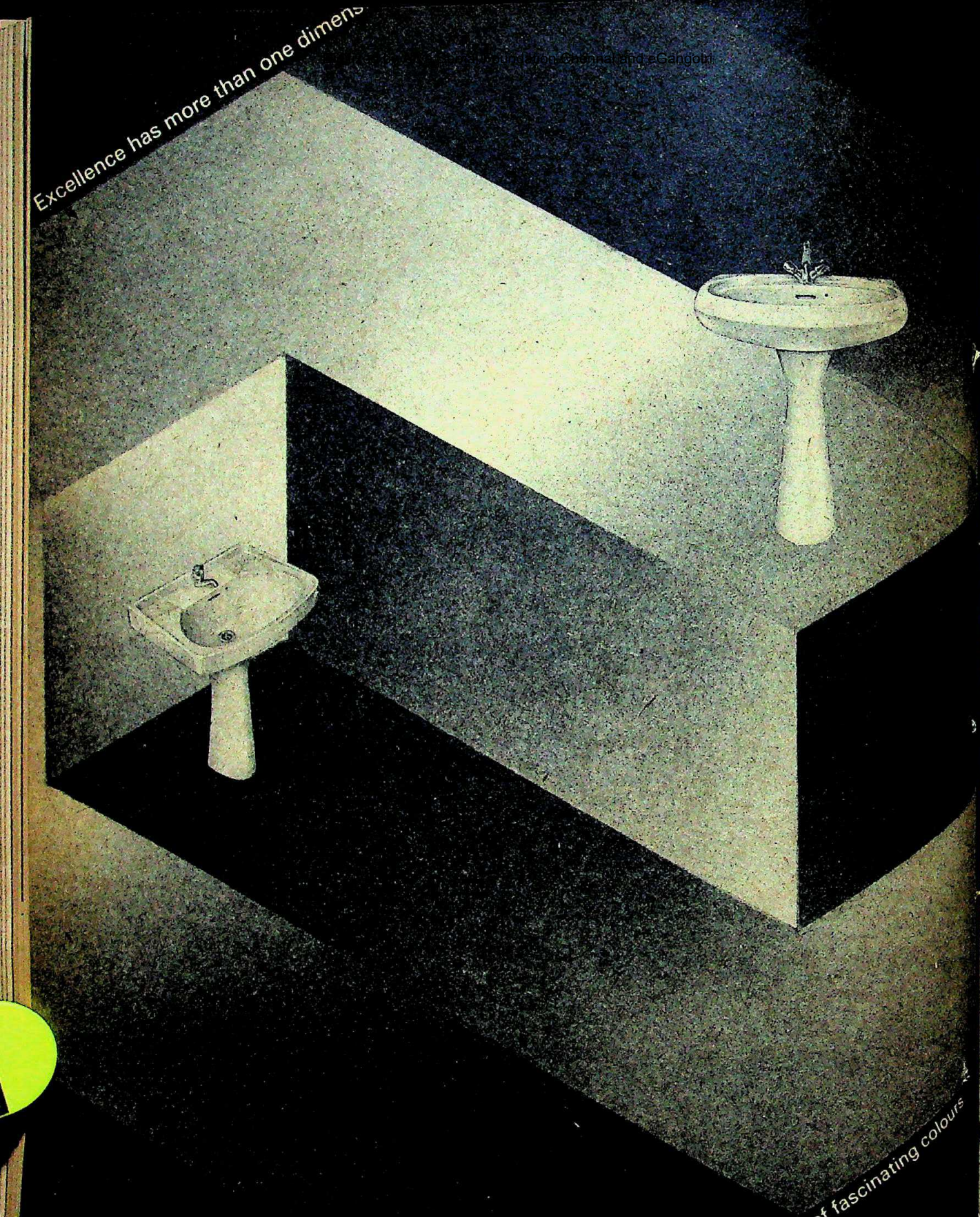
In the article "Happy New Year" (January 31) you have mentioned that most of the usual blue chips were beaten to the post by large numbers of obscure scrips, such as Rassi and Andhra Cements. But the most obscure scrip of the year—Oswal Agro Mills Ltd. was missed by you, which was quoted at Rs 14 in the beginning of the year and then reached a high of Rs 98.

Rajkot — *Ghanshyam Gajjar*

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OUTDATED DATA

Reference to the article "Descent Into Mediocrity" (January 31) Jay Dubashi refers to 1981 figures in 1984. Isn't that a reflection of how fast we are progressing. A country with a satellite and computer links ought to have data of a month back—enough even for a forecast. What use are 1981 figures for us! Being an engineer in oil production, I'd say three year old data is totally useless when the country's oil production is increasing by 15 per cent every six months.

Jabalpur *Sanjay Kumar*
Vrishsana

■ You would have done better comparing the percentage rise of gross industrial produce of each country. Compared to the year 1960, India has gained over the US and UK, which countries have gone down to the ninth and tenth positions. India recorded a percentage rise of 525, compared to the 433 of UK and 412 of US.

Pune *Dr Vishvas Rane*

■ Your article on "Industrialisation" (January 31) should serve as an eye-opener. To improve the declining position of India in the world industrial ranking, an atmosphere conducive to a large scale expansion of industry should be created. It is time our industrial policy is recast to improve gross industrial output, both quantity and quality wise.

New Delhi *Rajendra Kumar*

DOCTORS' WOES

I wish to clarify certain points made in your article "Doctors in Trouble" (January 31), having worked in the UK health services for eight years. The new regulation of limited registration is meant for all foreign graduates and not just for Indian doctors. These doctors were invited by the British Government to work in the UK and they were permitted to stay only for five years. So no one is breaking any promises.

Indian doctors are compelled to take up jobs not popular with British doctors, and in most cases, have to work outside teaching hospitals. But it is equally true that most Indian doctors fail to achieve the post-graduate degree and 75 per cent of them choose to settle down in the UK as family practitioners. The new regulation is meant to put an end to this practice. What concerns me is the callous treatment meted to us after we return to India after receiving specialised training—problems of appointment, postings, transfers, and corruption.

Patna *Dr S.S. Thakur*

"TRUE" INDIANS

It is indeed shameful to thing that people affiliated to a particular political party are the only true Indians and the rest are anti-nationals ("Gearing for the Polls", January 31). In fact, those people who cash in on such slogans by exploiting gullible Indian masses are the real anti-nationals.

Jammu *R.K. Sudan*

INDIAN MONARCHY

After reading the Letter from the Editor (January 31) I could not help laughing at your ignorance, to think that India is still a democratic country. Like any other monarchical government, India too is under a dynastic rule, the rule of the Nehru dynasty. So Sumit Mitra should apologise for his unnecessary interference into the matters of the Indira National Congress.

Bhubaneswar *T.S.P. Rao*

THE MILKY WAY

The guidance and help rendered by NDDB and IDC (January 31) has helped our Sangam Dairy under the Guntur District Milk Producers Cooperative Union Ltd. It has become the most successful dairy running in the cooperative sector in south India. The emergence of the operation flood programme has enabled milk producers to organise, conduct and meet their ends. The criticism levelled against Dr Verghese Kurien and his programmes holds no ground. People who are not involved in the white revolution are not the judges to express the impact of rural oriented schemes to which lakhs of innocent farmers and their growth is linked.

Krishnayapalem *Karumanchi Venkataswamy*

■ Nanak Singh says he is not afraid of competition. His only interest is protecting the consumers of Jammu & Kashmir. If, as he says, no customer will disagree that it is better to have his fresh milk rather than NDDB's why doesn't he drop his threats and let the customers decide?

Vadodara *Rameshbhai C. Patel*

TARNISHED HALO

The interview with N.T. Rama Rao (January 31) proved that the Andhra Pradesh chief minister is not above "double-speak". Through his contradictory statements, one can understand that he is no avatar, only one among many selfish, errant human beings. To win the confidence of the people, he must according to his own statement, (double) speak less and (unselfishly) work more for the poor. His election way not an alternative to the Congress(I), only a substitute.

Siddipet *V. Srinivasa Chari*

■ It is the people who are the ultimate judges of any government for either endorsing or disapproving the policies. Chief Minister Rama Rao should take all positive steps in implementing sound, socio-economic programmes to eradicate the growing poverty of the people. The people who voted him to power now look to him to give them "the Government that works well" for the betterment of their lives.

Hyderabad *M. Narasimha Rao*

FATE OF FILMS

In your article on video piracy (January 31) the decline in export of Indian films from 1979 to 1982 was attributed solely to video piracy, which is not tenable, as the degenerating quality of Indian films being produced is also one of the pivotal factors.

Baroda *Mahesh Natani*

DISTURBED SIKHS

This refers to your article "Feuding Sikhs" (January 31). It is wrong to say that the incident in Gurudwara Rakabgunj on the eve of the birthday celebrations of Guru Gobind Singh was a faction fight between two Akali groups. In fact plainclothesmen as well as hired goons were planted in connivance with the powers that rule this country and the disturbance was pre-planned.

New Delhi *Guru Charan Singh*

THE LURE OF THE GULF

Gulf jobs and money are not the motivating factors behind conversion as contended in "The Gulf Stream" (January 31). Many people, particularly from south India, who work in Gulf countries are not Muslims.

Being enlightened through education, which was provided only after Independence, the Harijans realised their age-old sufferings and suppression in the caste-ridden society, and found dignity and solace in switching over to a new faith. If conversion is neither a crime nor a law and order problem there seems no justification for the state to interfere nor is it proper for the media to play it up.

Bhubaneswar *M.A. Ahad*

BANKER'S REFUTAL

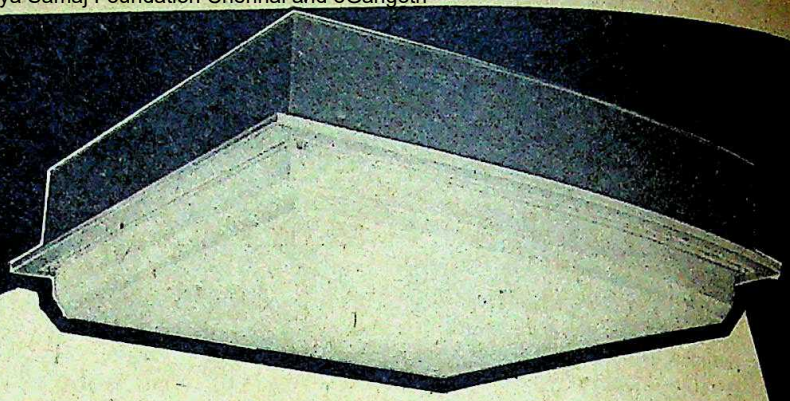
This refers to your article "Falling from Grace" (January 15). Your comments on Al Futtaim group and its dealings with Middle East Bank are baseless and incorrect. The Al Futtaim group borrowings from Middle East Bank, net of cash deposits with the Bank, have always been within the limits sanctioned by the UAE Central Bank under its existing regulations. Middle East Bank International is an entirely separate and independent bank, with its subsidiary in Hong Kong called Middle East Finance International. Al Futtaim group is not a borrowing client of either of these organisations.

Dubai (UAE) *Afzal Hasan*
Al Futtaim Pvt Ltd

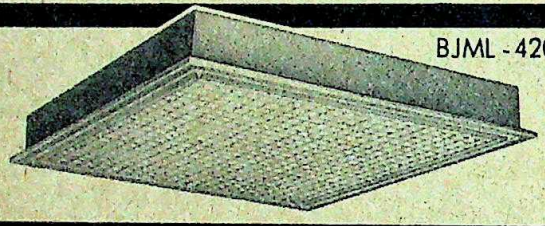
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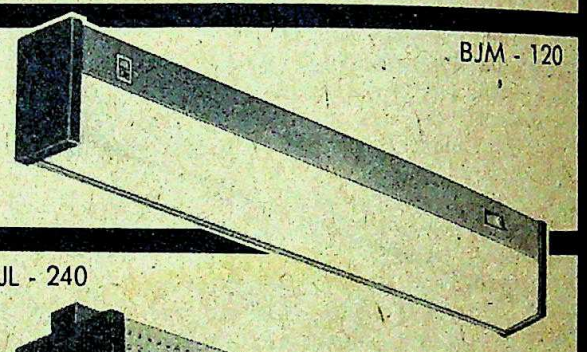
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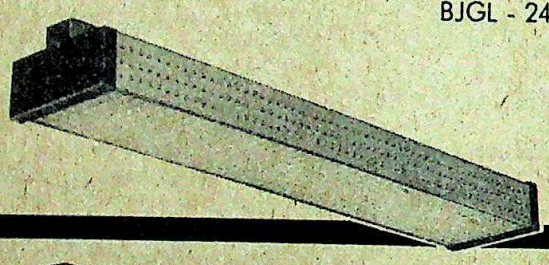
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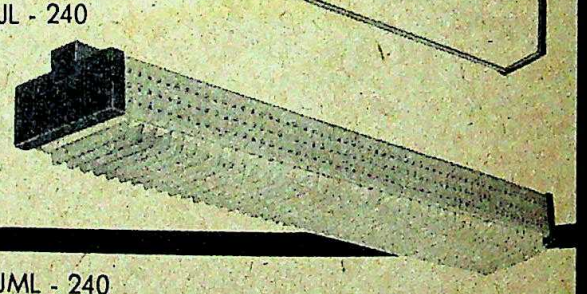
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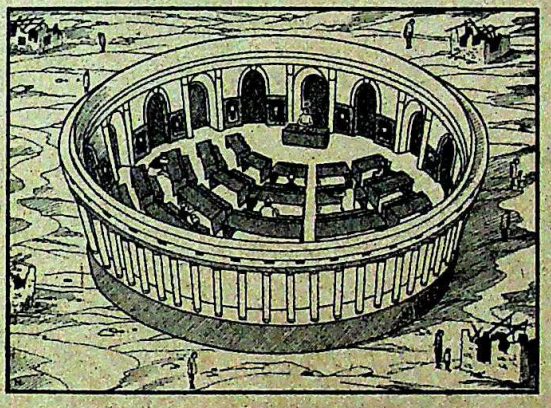
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INDIA TODAY
THE COMPLETE NEWSMAGAZINE

The Decline of Debate

IN A LAND where the most solemn of undertakings are often reduced to meaningless rituals, it is hardly surprising that the most solemn of rituals should be so transparently devoid of substance. In a few days, Parliament will reconvene with all the ritual of a grand and solemn undertaking. But it has slid so far since the first time it assembled in 1951 that the ceremonial congregation of the nation's premier legislators today evokes no more than a reflexive, soporific nod. More than three decades ago, when Parliament convened for the first time, India's first prime minister reminded its members that "the responsibility for the governance of India, for the advancement of India, lies on this and future parliaments". If Parliament did not come up to the people's expectations, he warned, "then it will bode India no good". The warning was prophetic. Today, on the eve of the last budget session of this Lok Sabha, it isn't only the shadow of the next general election that looms large over it, it is the grey smudge of cynicism that marks it indelibly.



A scant two months ago, the speaker of the Lok Sabha put his finger on the malaise when, chairing a conference of presiding officers, he lamented the failure of the country's legislatures to conduct their proceedings with dignity, seriousness and decorum. The speaker was giving contemporary vent to a creeping sickness that the jurist M.C. Chagla lamented 16 years ago when he wrote that the majority of MP's were "not interested" in the working of Parliament. While grave issues were debated desultorily in near-empty houses, members thronged the Central Hall "to discuss political and party matters which are of vital concern to them". The decline is well documented. In 1982, former prime minister Charan Singh walked out of the Lok Sabha rather than speak to a galaxy of empty chairs on the sombre issue of the country's sixth plan. Last December, only a handful of members turned up to discuss the plan's mid-term appraisal.

In the third Lok Sabha, elected in 1962, legislative business took up an impressive 48.8 per cent of Parliament's time. In the fourth Parliament, it fell to an abysmal 18.8 per cent, rising to 30 per cent in the fifth, only to fall back to 21.4 per cent in the sixth Parliament elected in 1977.

Nor is the position much better for what is felt to be one of the more useful parts of parliamentary proceedings: question hour. In the first Lok Sabha, the speaker received 71,907 questions and admitted 61 per cent of them. Since then, the percentage has steadily declined to a mere 39 per cent of the 252,790 questions forwarded in the fifth Lok Sabha, indicating an apparent lack of preparation in framing questions. Some of those that did get through showed up the calibre of the questioners. Not too many years ago, one parliamentarian wanted the Government to tell him when India would send a man to the moon. Another wanted to know if the Government contemplated a census of hijras. Yet another wanted to know why the Government didn't introduce more stops on one of Delhi's bus routes. One member even asked when the Government would build a port in Bihar. Considering that Rs 10,000 is spent on an average on each question and the bureaucracy comes to a virtual halt during parliament sessions with civil servants doing little other than answering questions, it is little less than astonishing that most starred questions, which require oral answers from ministers, couldn't be taken up because members who had asked them couldn't be bothered to attend question hour.

THE GRAVER the issue, the less time parliamentarians seem to have for it. A special discussion in the Lok Sabha last year on atrocities against Adivasis ended abruptly for lack of a quorum. Several days later the spectacle was repeated when the House was discussing threats to national integrity. The nadir was the recent discussion on the amendment to the bill on rape; of the country's 786 MP's only 28 turned up. The litany of wasted time and money is endless. MP's are supposed to represent the interest of their constituents and not just the party to which they belong, yet there is little in Parliament's voluminous proceedings that suggests they fulfil this task. It is hardly worth reminding MP's that it costs almost Rs 3.5 lakh a day to keep Parliament running or that it is the nuts and bolts of democracy which rust because of their neglect. The purpose of Parliament is simple, and bears repeating: after determining who is to form the national Government, it is Parliament's task to keep an eye on that government and to scrutinise on behalf of the people who elect it its policies, budgets and activities. Unlike Nehru, for instance, who was exemplary in his deference to the House, subsequent prime ministers have reduced it to an afterthought in the business of governance. The passage of ordinances when Parliament is not in session is evidence enough.

The manner in which would-be parliamentarians are chosen is almost calculated to cripple rather than strengthen Parliament. In the last 15 years no party has made any effort to develop able parliamentarians with the result that there are no replacements for men like H.N. Kunzru, H.V. Kamath, Lanka Sundaram and Hiren Mukherjee.

As the Lok Sabha assembles next week it must do so in an introspective mood, to see if the paramountcy of an individual over the system is conducive to the growth of Parliament into a strong, active and effective watchdog of government. What Benjamin Disraeli said of Peel in the last century is relevant today of anyone who believes that he or she must have the last word on all questions: "He...wants to figure in history as the settler of all the great questions; but a parliamentary constitution is not favourable to such ambitions; things must be done by parties, not by persons using parties as tools." Indian leaders both in power and in opposition have yet to discover this truth.

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October 4th. 1983.

Mr. Satish Kumar Modi,
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India.

Dear Mr. Modi,

I would like to thank you very much for coming to my office during your last visit to England, and to say how much I enjoyed our meeting.

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It is my firm intention to send some executives from my Company, and Buyers, to visit you very shortly and I am certain additional business will be developed as a result. I would also like very much to take you up on your offer to visit you early in the new year, I will discuss the date with Dr. Sharma in due course.

I would like to conclude by congratulating you and your entire staff for having the resources to produce the quality of carpet range which is desirable for our department stores, as it is our intention to continue a programme of up-grading our merchandise and your carpets will enable us to uphold this policy.

Thank you for your personal friendship.

Yours sincerely,

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Managing Director

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➤ At no time have I criticised Sanjay Gandhi. Nor do I criticise Rajiv Gandhi. Why blame them? They are the aberrations of Mrs Gandhi's politics.

—*Chandra Shekhar in* Weekend Review

➤ The Congress leadership in the state (Jammu & Kashmir) is so ambitious, so short-sighted and so impatient about coming to power that they are mostly on the streets.

—*Syed Mir Qasim in* The Sunday Observer

➤ People who spend Rs 40 crore for a week-end of rest and recreation in Goa should not teach us what is productive and non-productive expenditure...I am not prepared to learn economics from an airline pilot whose only qualification is that he is his mother's son.

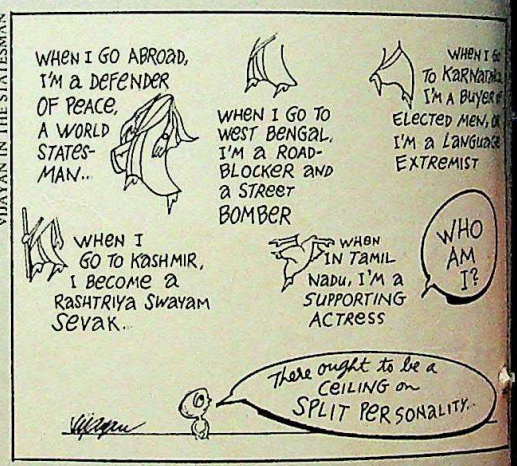
—*Ashok Mitra in* Probe India

➤ An election is not a referendum at all. Even criminals can get elected on a ticket of any political party.

—*Ramakrishna Hegde in* Onlooker

➤ We cast him (Gandhi) in bronze, feature him in plays and discuss him at seminars. Every such act of invention of embellishment must turn Gandhi more and more into a character of fiction—the more unreal, the less of a threat.

—*Claude Alvares in the* Express Magazine



➤ Industrialists are worried that the Congress(I) is not asking them for money (for elections)...contributions to the party give a feeling of security to the industrialist.

—*Kuldip Nayar in* Sunday

➤ Rajiv (Gandhi) has learnt the caution of a commercial pilot rather than the rashness of an acrobat, and his computers tell him he has still a long way to go before he can take off safely.

—*Janardan Thakur in* The Illustrated Weekly of India

➤ I would prefer to be served on a long transcontinental plane journey by an efficient J.R.D. Tata or an alert Khushwant Singh rather than a handsome young man who is wearing bottom-hugging trousers, but is utterly useless at his job.

—*Tariq Ali in* Sunday

➤ We do not want democracy, we want Shiv Shahi—Shiv rule...only those Muslims who would accept civil codes, anti-cow slaughter and concepts of Hindu Rashtra would be allowed to stay in the country.

—*Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray in* Bombay

➤ When social and economic discontent (in Punjab) is translated into communal grievances, it becomes much more dangerous, making demons out of partners, and heroes out of murderers.

—*Attar Singh in* Seminar

➤ These income tax people think film industry people are villains. But I can tell them, no star eats gold biscuits for dinner.

—*Rajnikant in* The Times of India

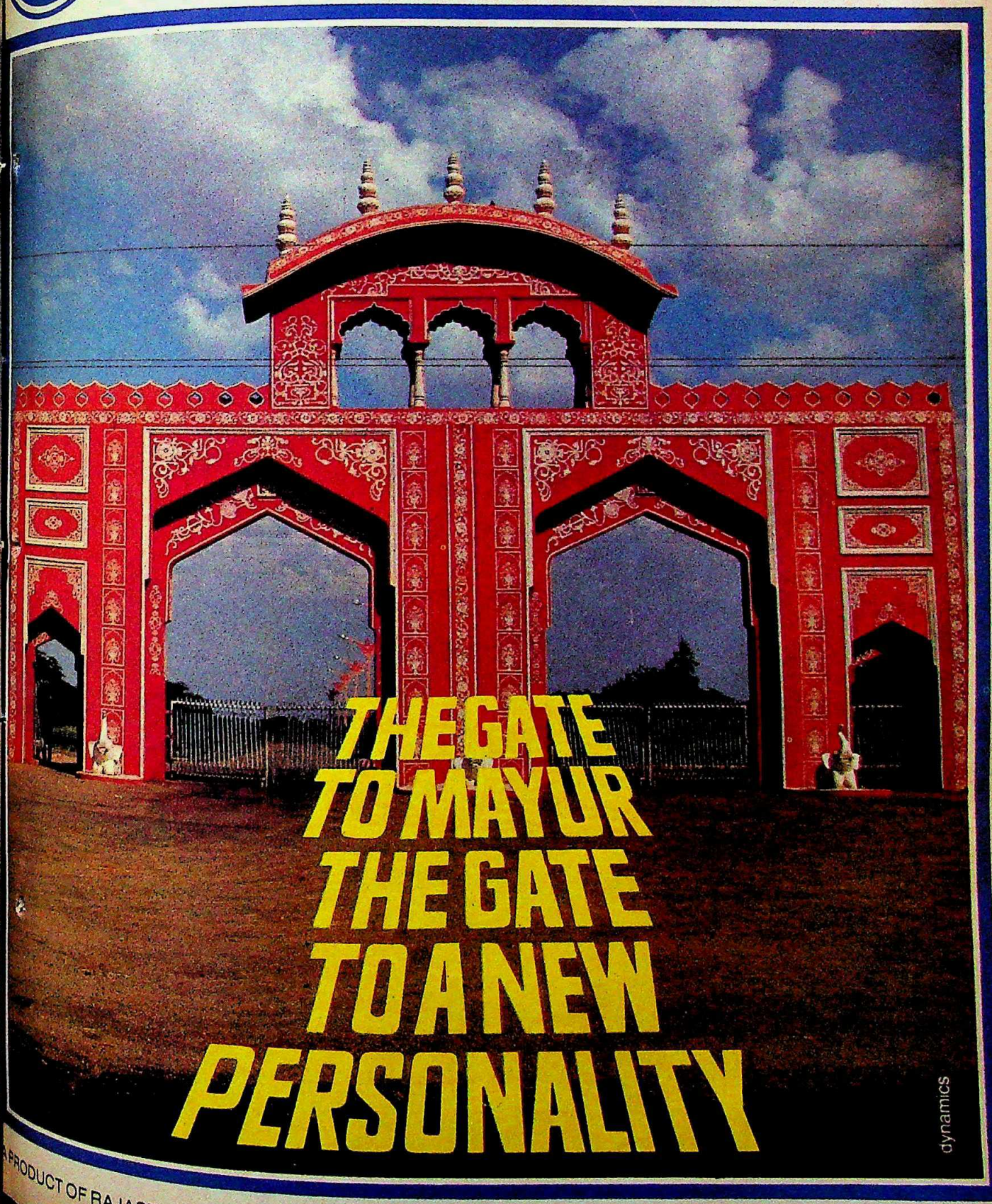
➤ I am only wriggling my bottom on the sets for dance numbers because that's what people want from me...If I refuse to bare my body, do you think there will be no vulgarity in Indian films? My foot.

—*Silk Smitha in* Star

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MAYUR
SUITING
SHIRTING

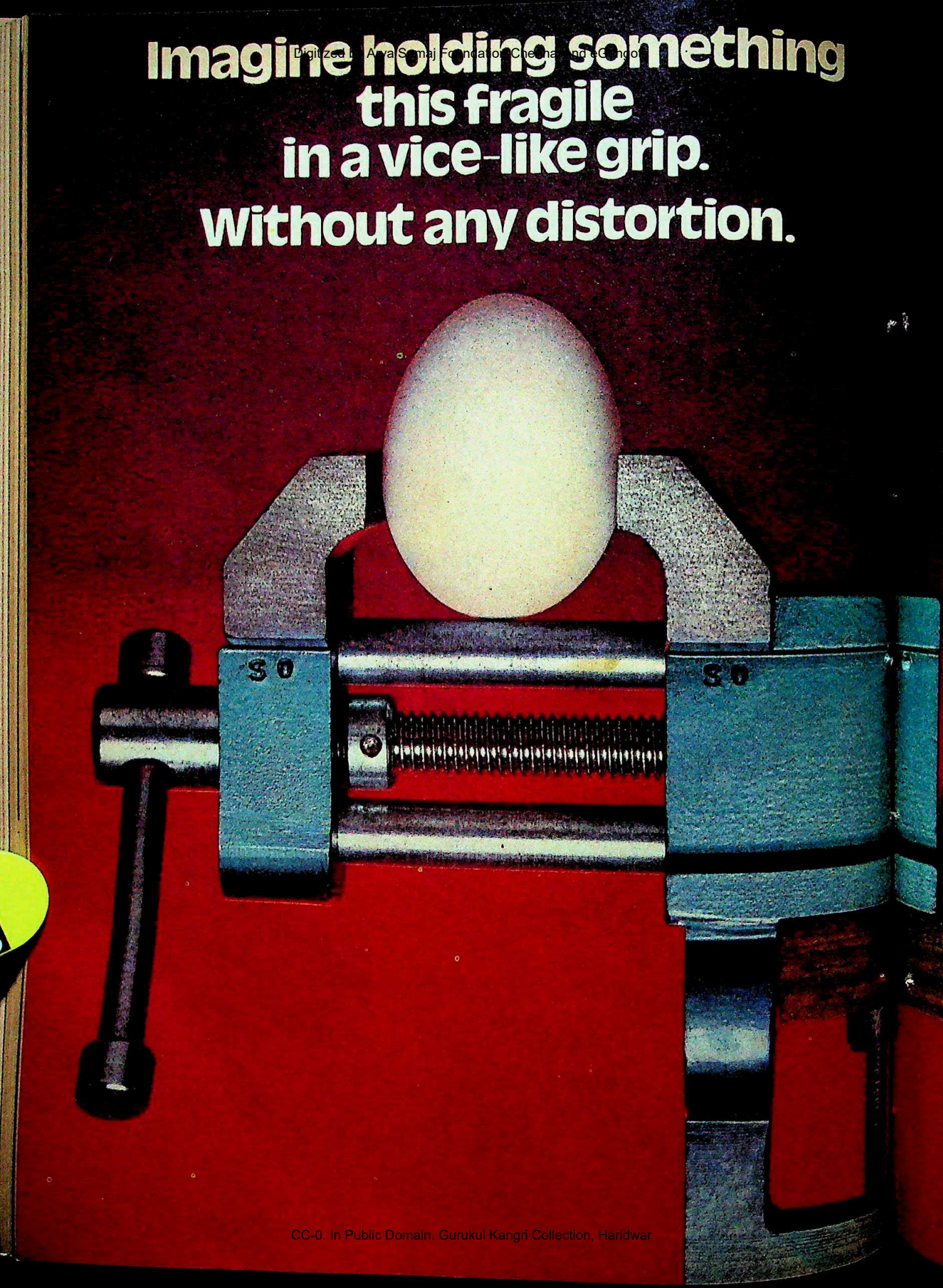


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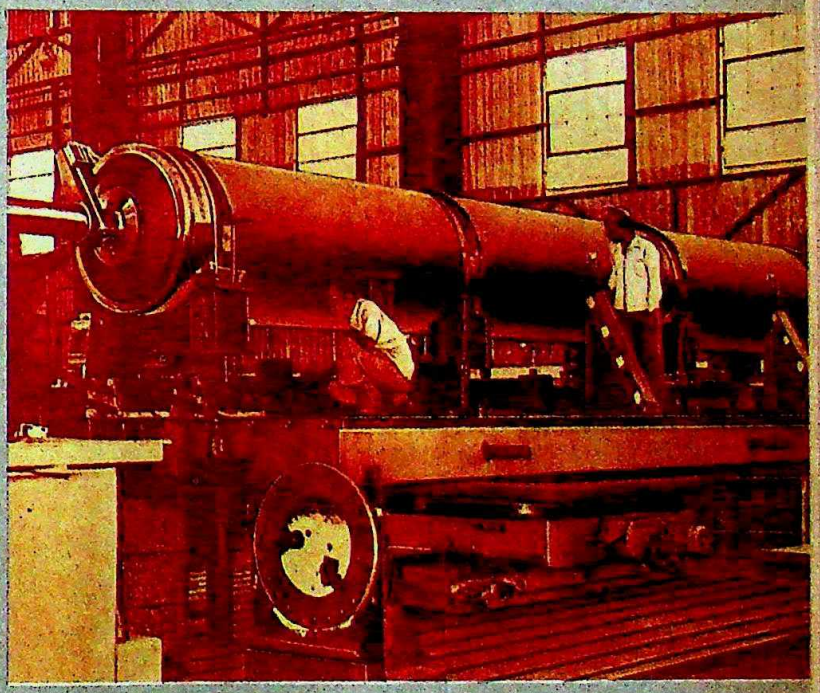
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POWER PLAY

■ Vengeance can be terrible, especially if the avenger subscribes to the ancient notion of a head for an eye. Take the case of a Karnataka Electricity Board meter reader in Bangalore. He went to a cinema hall with four friends to watch his favourite hero and heroine cavorting. Unlike many others, however, he wasn't interested in buying a ticket and told the manager that he and his friends should be allowed in free. The manager, not a little taken aback, retorted that the meter reader could get in free but his friends would have to buy tickets. Angry words from meter reader. Exit right, cursing.

After this strange things began to happen. The police say that the meter reader rang up his office and told them that a wire had snapped on the highway. Later, he was said to have switched off power supply to the transformer that serviced the cinema hall. This naturally had some drastic consequences, notably a loud explosion which was followed by a total black-out in the area. The cinema hall, of course, was as much affected as anybody else, and none more so than the hero who had finally managed to get into a steamy clinch with his heroine.

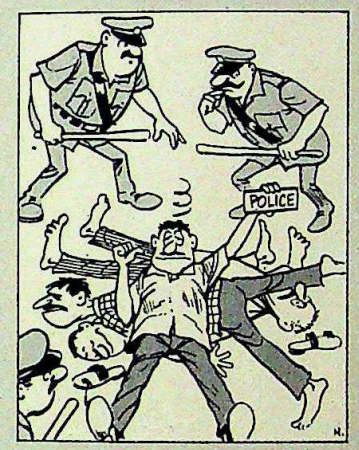


ON THE BEAT

■ On a tragic level, mistaken identities usually have disastrous consequences: Oedipus, for instance. On the comic level, they have side-splitting results, like *The Comedy of Errors*. The story of four policemen on a dingy Hyderabad street probably falls somewhere in between.

They were in mufti and were escorting a woman described tactfully in records as a person of "loose character". Perhaps their behaviour with her was not as tactful as the newspaper reports were, for people on the way noticed and started to ask questions. Unfortunately for the plainclothesmen, among the spectators was another quartet of police from the Andhra Pradesh Special Police (APSP) who had been escorting a procession of demonstrators.

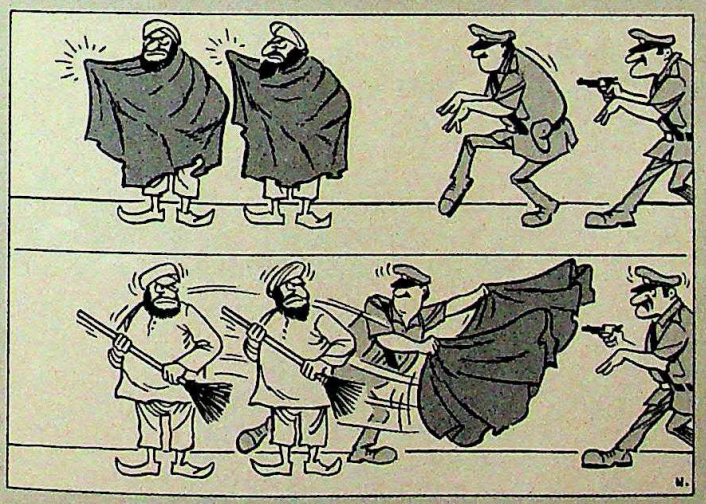
The inevitable happened. The APSP cops jumped on the city cops and started belabouring them. While the woman of loose character stood smirking on one side, the Hyderabad police were battered so badly that their plainclothes looked as if they had been bought in a flea market. It was only when one of them spat out some teeth and managed to make himself heard that the others realised their mistake. In any case, the cops can still say that they were on the beat.



LOAFING ON THE JOB

■ While on the subject of mistaken identities the Ludhiana police ought to be able to speak fluently on the topic. The story begins when the general assistant to the deputy commissioner looked out of his window one morning and noticed two suspicious-looking characters hanging around on the corner of the street. He lost no time in phoning up the police to tell them that he didn't like the look of those two persons loitering about. Moreover they appeared to have Sten guns hidden underneath their voluminous cloaks.

The police in Punjab are jumpier than usual lately and that remark about Sten guns concealed under cloaks gave them wings. In no time at all the flying squad was on the scene, inspectors of all hues fanned out with hands on gun butts, somebody whipped away the voluminous cloaks —and wrenched away two brooms from the hands of two municipal sweepers.



LIVE SHOW

■ The medium is the message. How, for example, does a cinema in a Madhya Pradesh town promote the film *Coolie*, when reams have been written about the nearly fatal accident and the miraculous escape from the jaws of death? Saying anything more on the subject would, with apologies to the superstar, be a little monotonous, and the cinema owner tried out a novel method of persuading people to come and see one of the zaniest block busters going.

The town has a fairly large railway station. The manager went down and announced that he was inviting all coolies present to a free show. Snacks and drinks were on the house. That afternoon a procession of coolies, dressed in their familiar attire, strode down the streets to the cinema hall, trooped in and sat through three hours of Bachchan, Bachchan and Bachchan, with a dash of other stars thrown in here and there for variety. It is reported that when the picture froze into the famous blow that felled a titan, the sobbing could be heard for miles around.

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI



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The Mhatre Murder

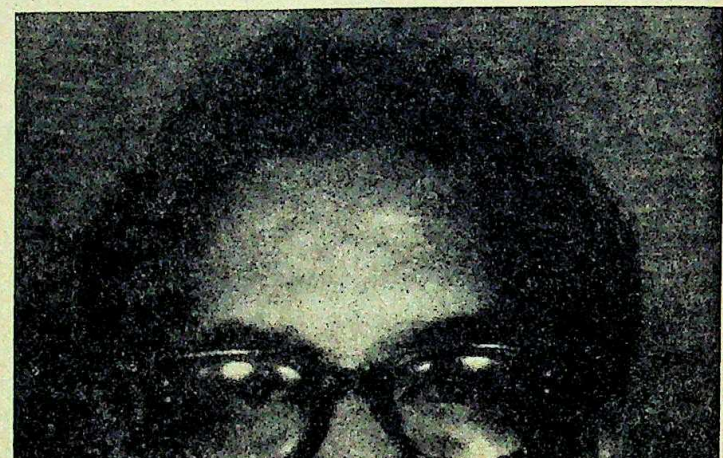
The brutal murder of an Indian diplomat in Birmingham and the subsequent hanging Azad Kashmir terrorist Maqbool Butt in Delhi resurrects the Kashmir issue and adds significant new dimension to the confrontation between Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minis Farooq Abdullah and the Centre.

SANDWICHED between two clothing stores at 86 New Street in Birmingham, the Indian consulate is not an easy place to find in this teeming industrial town. The only clues are the tricolour fluttering in the brisk February air from a second floor receptacle and a brass plate outside the doors that directs visitors upstairs. Nonetheless, it is conveniently enough situated for the city's large Asian immigrant population. (The Pakistan Consulate is just down the road and Air-India has a regular flight direct from India.)

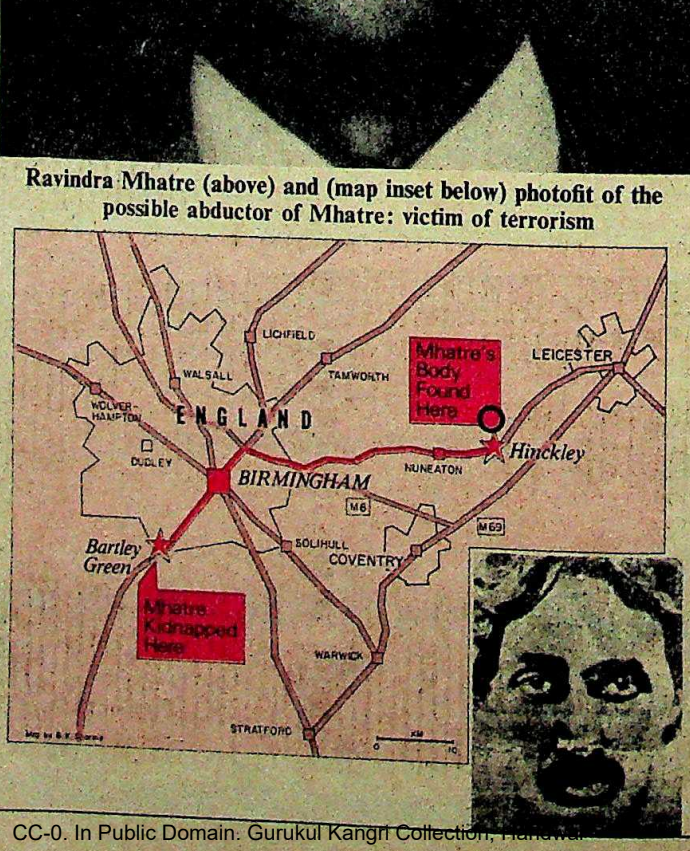
Friday, February 3, had been a quiet day at the consulate. Deputy Commissioner Baldev Kohli was away in London attending a farewell reception for Dr Syed Mohammed, the Indian high commissioner who was due to retire in a few days. The official in charge, Ravindra Mhatre, 49, assistant commissioner, was a man it was possible to set stopwatches by. A stern creature of habit, Mhatre clocked in and out of the office with metronomic exactness.

Rigid Routine: This Friday was no different. At precisely 5 p.m., Mhatre, a red lunch box tucked under his arm, emerged from the glass doors of the consulate office just in time to catch the same bus he had taken every working evening for the 18 months he had been in Birmingham. It was a bare two-mile run to his destination in the suburb of Bartley Green from where he strolled the few hundred yards to his terraced house.

He never got there. At 7 p.m., his anxious wife Shobha frantically dialled the consulate only to be told that her husband had left at his usual hour. In desperation, she then telephoned



Ravindra Mhatre (above) and (map inset below) photofit of the possible abductor of Mhatre: victim of terrorism



Kohli in London, who c... her down and promised t... into the matter. But being ... liar with Mhatre's fast... ways, he knew something ... seriously wrong. He waited ... p.m. and then alerted the ... mingham police. Accordin... him, at first the Birmin... police took little notice. It ... only on Saturday mo... when there was still no tra... the missing diplomat, tha... started checking hospitals ... lonely roads in case Mhatre ... met with an accident.

He had. But it was no ac... dent. At 3 a.m. on Saturda... sleepy night editor at the ... national news agency Re... office in London's Fleet S... was jerked into wakefulne... a hand-delivered message ... ed by a group calling itself ... Kashmir Liberation A... (KLA). The message, rid... with grammatical errors, te... stated that they had kidnap... an Indian diplomat and wo... kill him unless their dem... were met.

The demands included ... release of Maqbool Butt, ... "Azad Kashmir" extremist ... agent provocateur awaiting ... death sentence in Delhi's Ti... jail for murder, arson and ... national activities; two of ... accomplices guilty of hija... an Indian Airlines aircra... Lahore in 1971, and severe... Kashmiris arrested during ... violence at last year's one... cricket match in Sri... against the West Indies. ... third demand on the list was ... a ransom of £1 million (R... crore). The deadline was 1... on Saturday—16 hours ... Tragically, since the mes... did not specify which city ... even country the kidnap... had taken place in, the ca...

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...with Mhatre's disappearance was not ...made till much later.

Amateur Methods: The Reuters man ...had every reason to dismiss the message as a ...crank letter: the bad English, the fact that ...the KLA had never been heard of, that no ...contact address or telephone number was ...given and no news of an Indian diplomat ...having been kidnapped had come in. Terro...ists who make demands need instant com...munication channels to apply their peculiar ...kind of psychological pressure. In this case, ...the KLA either didn't know the ...or had no intention of ne...tiating.

Despite the obvious amateurishness, the Reuters man was intrigued enough to contact Scotland Yard's Special Branch and pass on the contents of the message. Since the Birmingham 'missing man' report had still not come in, it was not till much later that morning that the manhunt was eventually launched. By then, the KLA had made their second contact.

This time, they called Zubair Ansari, secretary-general of the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) in Birmingham, one of the better-known of the handful of fringe groups in Europe supposedly fighting for an independent Kashmir—which is also known as the Jammu & Kashmir National Liberation Front (JKNLF). Butt, the man whose release was the first of their demands, was one of its co-founders. A rough-sounding voice asked Ansari how their demands were being responded to and authorised him to negotiate on their behalf. As before, they gave no contact number or address.

Stalling Tactics: Ansari informed the police who put a tap on the phone. The kidnappers called twice again and as instructed by the police, Ansari, on one occasion, was able to push the deadline back by three hours, till 10 p.m., Saturday night, when Mhatre and his family were meant to be quietly celebrating the 14th birthday of their only daughter, Asha.

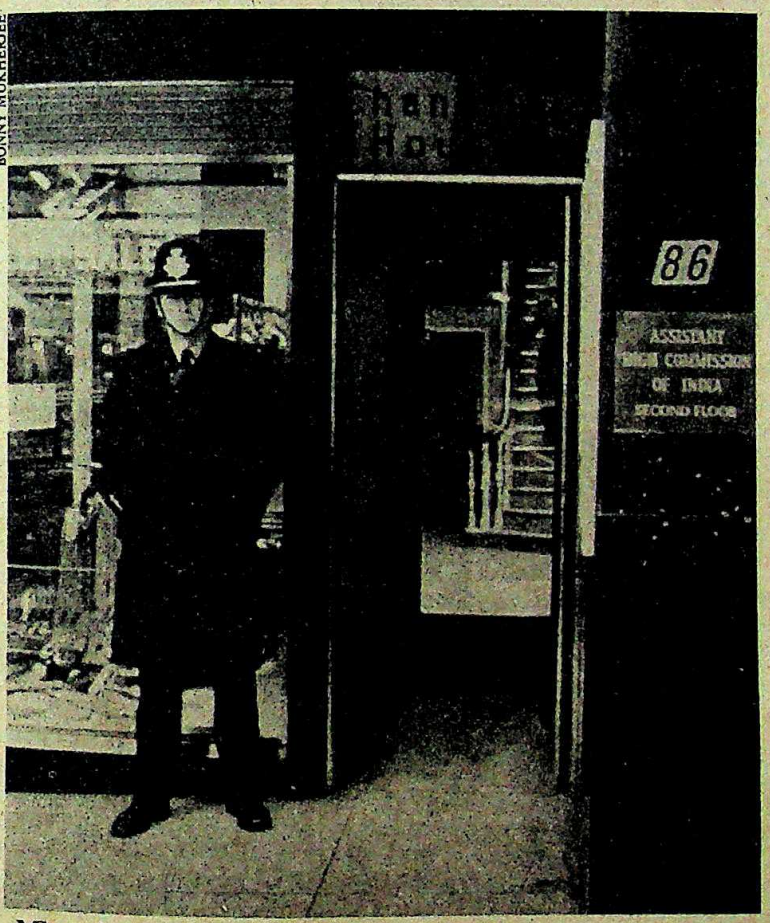
The kidnappers, meanwhile, made their last known contact. Shortly after 10 p.m., the telephone rang again in the dilapidated house in an Asian area of Birmingham that serves as Ansari's office-cum-residence. "It looks as if you people have not taken it seriously," said the voice, "now you will have to face the consequences."

The seriousness of that threat was brutally evident on Sunday evening. More than 48 hours after the kidnapping, Joyce Tallis turned into the drive of her farm in Hinckley, Leicestershire, some 40 miles from Birmingham, and braked sharply. Her headlights had picked out the body of an elderly man sprawled in the concrete driveway. He had been shot twice in the head and the body.

Identification of the body as Mhatre was only a grim formality and earned him the dubious distinction of being the only Indian diplomat to be killed by terrorists.

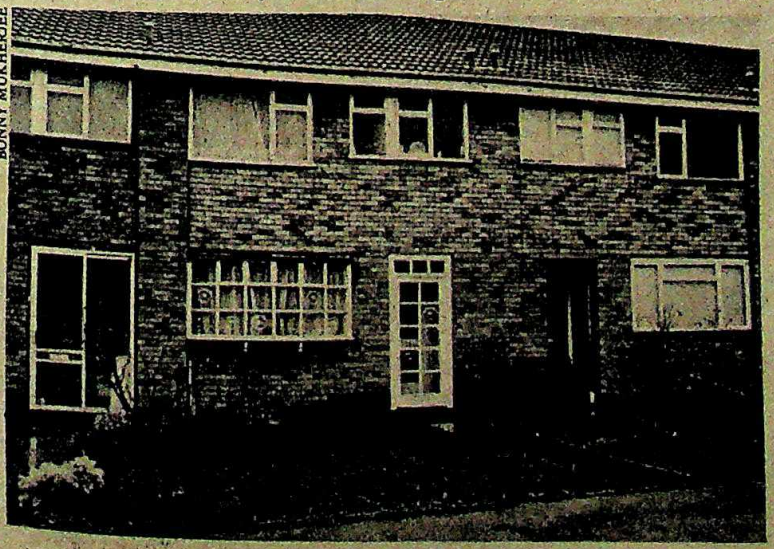
Shock Waves: Back in India, news of the slaying sent shock waves through South Block and the rest of the country. At first, it appeared that the Indian Government had bungled the whole affair by not treating it seriously enough. But later investigations revealed that the activity had indeed been considerable. Below is a reconstruction of the happenings in South Block after the news of Mhatre's kidnapping was received.

BONNY MUKHERJEE



Mhatre's office (above) and his Birmingham house: numbing tragedy

BONNY MUKHERJEE



Saturday 4 p.m. (IST): Telephone call from London High Commission to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) informing them of the missing diplomat. The message was given to Romesh Bhandari, the seniormost MEA official present (Foreign Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and Foreign Secretary M.K. Rasgotra were out of Delhi as was Prime Minister Indira Gandhi).

Saturday 4.15 p.m: Attempt made to inform prime minister who was in the air at the time en route to Gauhati. She was given the news when she landed.

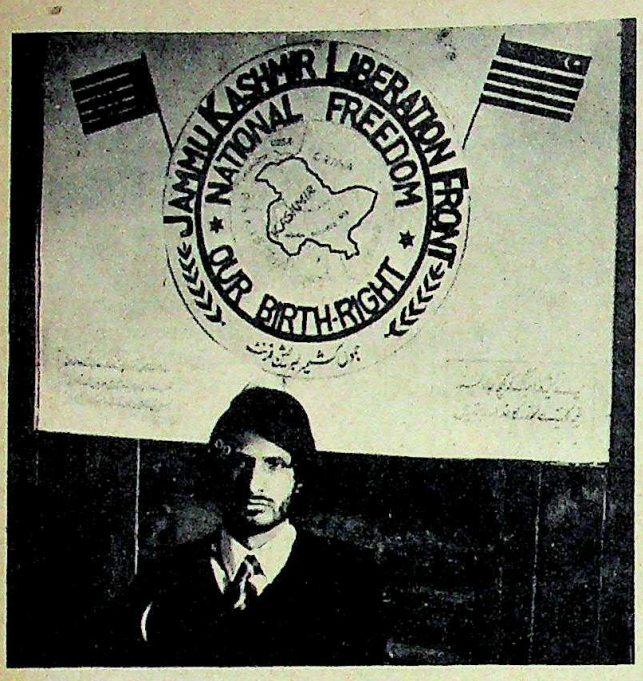
Saturday 4.20 p.m: Members of Crisis Management Group contacted and informed of the situation. The group included (apart from the prime minister, foreign minister and foreign secretary) Principal Secretary P.C. Alexander, Cabinet Secretary Krishnaswamy Rao Saheb, Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee (for possible ransom demand), Intelligence Adviser R.N. Kao and the chiefs of RAW and the Intelligence Bureau (IB). It was agreed to meet at 9.30 p.m that night.

Saturday 5 p.m: Bhandari contacts the British High Commission in New Delhi for use of their communication channels to London and asks on behalf of the Government to convey to the British Home Office the seriousness of the situation.

Saturday 9.30 p.m: Crisis Management Group meets and is given latest information. Decision taken to send MEA official Gauri Shankar and senior IB officer to London. Agreement reached that only alterna-

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tive is to play for time. Intelligence heads report no information available on KLA but its links with JKLF is distinct possibility.

Sunday 12.30 a.m: Meeting ends with decision to reassemble at 12.30 on Sunday afternoon. Indian high commissioner ordered to stay on in London and postpone his departure indefinitely.

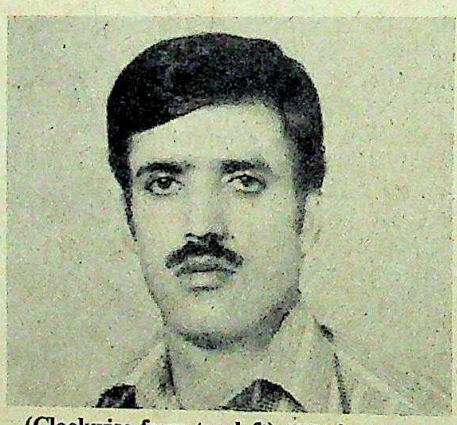
Sunday 12.30 p.m: Group meets again and given updated information and latest state of Scotland Yard investigations. Mhatre still untraced. IB reports from Kashmir offer no clues. Birmingham consulate and London high commission contacted. Since identity of kidnappers a mystery, no negotiations possible but decision taken that it would best be left to British authorities to track down kidnappers.

Sunday 2 p.m: Meeting breaks up.

Monday 7 a.m: News arrives that Mhatre has been shot and his body discovered.

Monday 9 a.m: Crisis Group meets again and makes certain recommendations to prime minister including possibility of Pakistan involvement.

Monday 10 a.m: Emergency meeting of Cabinet Committee for Political Affairs (CCPA) with Mrs Gandhi in the chair. Decision taken to hang Butt as soon as legally possible. Official dispatched to Calcutta to obtain President Zail Singh's signature on rejection of Butt's mercy petition. Second official, Home Ministry trouble-shooter P.P. Nayyar, sent to Kashmir to clear legal obstacles and obtain black warrant. Intelligence heads agree that Mhatre's killing is not random and more such attacks can be expected. Instructions sent to all diplomatic missions to tighten security. Decision taken to invite Akali leaders for talks to reduce possibility of Punjab extremists adopting similar tactics. Crackdown on Kashmir extremists to be intensified.



(Clockwise from top left) JKLF's Ansari in his Birmingham office; Hamid Diwani in jail in Pakistan after the 1976 hijack and Hashim Qureshi: links with KLA terrorists?

ON February 11, on a chilly winter morning in Delhi, Maqbool Butt took his final steps to the gallows and was hanged, a martyr to a questionable cause (*see page 26*). But several vital questions still remained. Who or what is the KLA? Why Mhatre? And, more important, why now? It is perhaps too early for definite answers to any of the questions but there are pointers in plenty. For one, Mhatre was an ideal target. As a relatively junior diplomat, he was not entitled to personal police protection. As a man of fastidious habits, his movements were predictable to the minute.

Two women, one a 26-year-old housewife and the other a football pools collector, have informed the police that a man answering Mhatre's description was grabbed by three men in a red car near the bus stop in Bartley Green at around 6 p.m on Friday. All indications point to the kidnappers being residents of Birmingham or at least familiar with the city. Birmingham serves as a base for a number of groups apart from the JKLF who are supporters of an independent Kashmir. (There are over 15,000 Kashmiris settled in Birmingham). IB files list six such groups, of which five are dismissed as "dormant", the sixth being the JKLF.

Assistant Chief Constable Tom [illegible] who is heading the team of 100 detectives working on the case, said that the position of the body suggested that the car was travelling from Leicestershire to Birmingham rather than the other way around. Leicestershire also has a large Kashmiri population. Some confusion was added to investigations when Mhatre's bus pass was found on the London to Sheffield railway line some 20 miles north of where he was found which raised the unlikely possibility of Mhatre and his abductors having travelled by train.

The Indian Government has not ruled out the possible involvement of the JKLF members acting on their own. JKLF president Amanullah Khan was picked up by Scotland Yard and held for questioning in the Mhatre case along with Hashim Qureshi, president of the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir branch of the organisation. Though Khan and Qureshi were subsequently released, the latter's involvement is significant. He was one of the two JKLF men who hijacked an Indian Airlines aircraft to Lahore in 1976. Butt was at Lahore airport to receive him. The aircraft was blown up and the two hijackers were jailed.

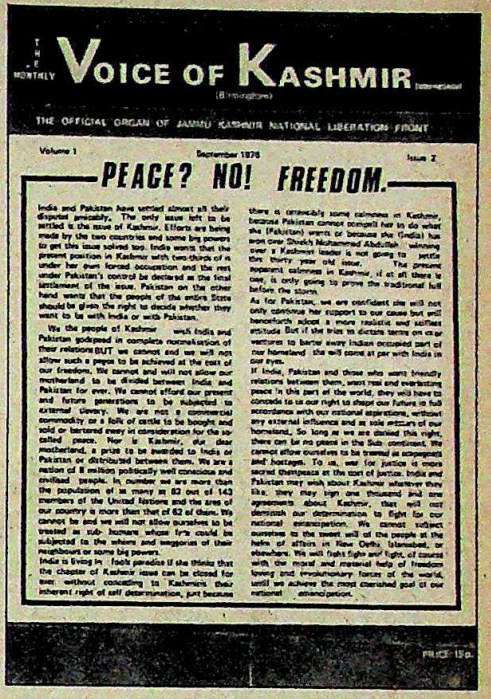
Significant Clues: Qureshi, according to Indian intelligence reports, was released in 1980. Significantly, he flew into London from Pakistan 10 days before the Mhatre murder and was staying with Amanullah Khan at his Luton residence. Reports from London indicate that he was seen in Birmingham around the time of Mhatre's abduction. There are also reports that another prominent JKLF activist, Abdul Hamid Qureshi, one of the six Kashmiri youths who hijacked another Indian Airlines aircraft to Lahore in 1976, is also believed to have slipped into London.

All this seems to suggest that the so-called KLA has closer links to the JKLF than many of them cared to admit. The JKLF was founded by Azad Kashmir immigrants in Birmingham. Its membership combines those of two parent extremist groups, the Plebiscite Front and the Azad Kashmir Front. The JKLF was founded to give one single

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THE MONTHLY VOICE OF KASHMIR

THE OFFICIAL ORGAN OF JAMMU KASHMIR NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT

Volume 1 September 1976 Issue 2

PEACE? NO! FREEDOM.

India and Pakistan have settled almost all their disputes amicably. The only issue left to be settled is the issue of Kashmir. Efforts are being made by the two countries and some big powers to get this issue solved too. India wants that the present position in Kashmir with two-thirds of it under her forced occupation and the rest under Pakistan's control be declared as the final settlement of the issue. Pakistan on the other hand wants that the people of the entire State should be given the right to decide whether they want to be with India or with Pakistan.

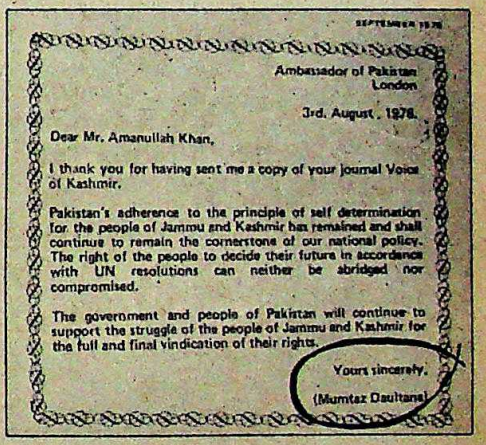
We the people of Kashmir wish India and Pakistan godspeed in complete normalisation of their relations BUT we cannot and we will not allow such a peace to be achieved at the cost of our freedom. We cannot and will not allow our motherland to be divided between India and Pakistan for ever. We cannot afford and present and future generations to be subjected to external slavery. We are not a commercial commodity or a lot of cattle to be bought and sold or bartered away in consideration for the so-called peace. Nor is Kashmir, our dear motherland, a prize to be awarded to India or Pakistan or distributed between them. We are a nation of 8 million politically well conscious and civilised people. In number we are more than the population of as many as 82 out of 143 members of the United Nations and the area of our country is more than that of 62 of them. We cannot be and we will not allow ourselves to be treated as sub- humans whose lives could be subjected to the whims and waggaries of their neighbours or some big powers.

India is living in fools paradise if she thinks that the chapter of Kashmir issue can be closed for ever without conceding to Kashmiris their inherent right of self determination, just because there is presently some calmness in Kashmir because Pakistan cannot compell her to do what she (Pakistan) wants or because she (India) has won over Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah winning over a Kashmiri leader is not going to settle this thirty year old issue. The present calmness in Kashmir, if at all there is one, is only going to prove the traditional lull before the storm.

As for Pakistan, we are confident she will not only continue her support to our cause but will henceforth adopt a more realistic and selfless attitude. But if she tries to dictate terms on us or ventures to barter away Indian occupied part of our homeland she will come at par with India in our eyes.

If India, Pakistan and those who want friendly relations between them, want real and everlasting peace in this part of the world, they will have to concede to us our right to shape our future in full accordance with our national aspirations, without any external influence and at sole mercy of our homeland. So long as we are denied this right, there can be no peace in the Sub-continent. We cannot allow ourselves to be treated as scapegoats and hostages. To us, our fair justice is more sacred than peace at the cost of justice. India and Pakistan may wish about Kashmir whatever they like, they may sign one thousand and one agreements about Kashmir, they will not diminish our determination to fight for our national emancipation. We cannot subject ourselves to the sweet will of the people at the helm of affairs in New Delhi, Islamabad, or elsewhere. We will fight fight and fight, of course with the moral and material help of freedom loving and revolutionary forces of the world, until we achieve the most cherished goal of our national emancipation.

PRICE 15p.



SEPTEMBER 1976

Ambassador of Pakistan
London

3rd. August, 1976.

Dear Mr. Amanullah Khan,

I thank you for having sent me a copy of your journal Voice of Kashmir.

Pakistan's adherence to the principle of self determination for the people of Jammu and Kashmir has remained and shall continue to remain the cornerstone of our national policy. The right of the people to decide their future in accordance with UN resolutions can neither be abridged nor compromised.

The government and people of Pakistan will continue to support the struggle of the people of Jammu and Kashmir for the full and final vindication of their rights.

Yours sincerely,

(Mumtaz Daultana)

Amanullah Khan addressing JKLF meeting in Birmingham (top left), party pamphlet (top right) which carried a letter from the Pakistan ambassador (above): anti-India crusade

to the voice of independent Kashmir in ...ain. However, Indian intelligence reports ...icate that the JKLF has pro-Pakistan lea... ...s and has offices in Islamabad, and ...pur and Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-...upied Kashmir apart from its headquar... ...in Birmingham. Butt's connections with ...istan's military intelligence are strongly ...shed (*see following story*).

The KLA and the JKLF share the same ... independence for Kashmir or the inte... ...ion of the entire state with Pakistan. ...tural to the JKLF's periodic demands and ...ers to the UN and Amnesty International ...been the release of Maqbool Butt.

Active Group: Of all the Kashmir extre... ...t groups, the JKLF has been the most voci... ...ous and active. Indian intelligence agen... ...say they have proof that the JKLF has ...n and still is funded by the Pakistan Go... ...ment. Whatever the truth of that, it has ...ived official verbal support from Pakis... ...on numerous occasions. One month ...fore the Indian Airlines aircraft was hijac... ...to Lahore in 1976, Mumtaz Dultana, ...Pakistan ambassador in London, sent ...official letter to the JKLF (*see photostat*) ex... ...support for the "struggle of the ...e of Jammu and Kashmir for the full ...final vindication of their rights".

The current chain of events that clima... ...in the Mhatre murder appears to have ...inated last September both in India and ...he UK, though the events in the two ...tries were unrelated. In September, the ...an Government issued instructions to ...in Kashmir to prepare dossiers and pin... ...the locations of all known extremists. ...tober, a number of them were arrested ...nection with the disturbances during the India-West Indies cricket match. Significantly, one of those arrested was Iqbal Qureshi, younger brother of Hashim Qureshi. Then, on January 26, the Indian Government ordered a crackdown. Over the next few days, at least 60 people were arrested, all suspected leaders or key officials of extremist organisations. Hashim Qureshi arrived in London just after the arrests started. The arrests ended on February 2. On February 3, Mhatre was kidnapped.

The coincidences stretch further. Six months ago, the JKLF in England split into two factions. The cause of the fissure is believed to be a dispute over whether the Front should get tougher in pursuit of its goals. Since then, the Amanullah faction has kept in the limelight. The other, led by Zabar Butt and referred to in Indian intelligence files as the "Bani" group, has kept a low profile.

New Militancy: In early January, the Amanullah group issued another of its periodic demands for an independent Kashmir from its Luton office. But this time, the language and tone was more radical than it has been before. However, JKLF stoutly denies any links with the Mhatre killing. Last fortnight, Zubaid Ansari told INDIA TODAY's Bonny Mukherjee: "I cannot say why our organisation's name was on the letter sent to Reuters. I am positive that none of our people are connected with this business." But the Zabar Butt group has remained silent. Informed sources in London say that the Butt group has objected to the autocratic behaviour of Amanullah Khan and Ansari and have accused them of misappropriating party funds.

The most credible theory, and one that the Indian Government subscribes to, is that Mhatre was killed as a reaction to the recent crackdown on extremists in Kashmir by a militant splinter group of the JKLF wanting to capture headlines. Last year, four younger members of the JKLF with British passports travelled to the Hague shortly before the Indian chancery there was burnt down. They have used every occasion to raise anti-Indian propaganda. Further fuel could have been added by reports carried by the *Daily Jung*, a local Urdu newspaper, alleging that the Indian army in Kashmir was victimising and even killing Kashmiris. In November 1977, the JKLF sent the Indian high commissioner, N.G. Goray, a tape-recorded message threatening to kill him unless Butt was released.

Constant Protests: Apart from the steady stream of memos and letters to the UN, Non-aligned meetings, Islamic summits

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and Amnesty International drawing attention to their cause, they staged an anti-India demonstration in 1982 when Mrs Gandhi was in Copenhagen and again in March 1982 in London when Mrs Gandhi arrived there for the Festival of India inauguration.

The question of why Mhatre is also possibly linked to the fact that he was based in Birmingham and the character of the Kashmiri population in Britain. Over 90 per cent of the Kashmiri population are Azad Kashmiris, mainly from Mirpur in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Their sympathies over the Kashmir issue are strongly in favour of Pakistan and the kidnappers would be assured of support from the local Kashmiri population in Birmingham. The Kashmiri population in Britain is estimated at 1 lakh spread over Birmingham, Leicester, Coventry, Bradford and Bolton.

In fact, after the murder of Mhatre, several Kashmiri organisations in Birmingham acclaimed the killers as heroes. Birmingham is also an ideal recruiting centre for activists. There is a high level of unemployment among young Asians in and around Birmingham and many of them have dropped out of school because of language problems. Most first generation immigrants have maintained close links with political organisations back home and many of their children, facing a sense of rejection in Britain, have channelled their frustrations into the politics of their parents' homeland, the only cause they can identify with. Added to this is the fact that Britain has now replaced Paris as the last refuge of exiles and dissi... flotsam. The British Government has ... ted the policy of allowing exiled dissident... litical groups to operate with the same ... dom permitted political parties.

Pakistani Reactions: In Pakistan ... as INDIA TODAY's Bhabani Sen Gupta ... from Islamabad, Butt's execution and ... Mhatre murder created few visible ... except among student groups and Ka... ris. In Karachi, the Indian Consulate ... been stoned but the tightly-controlled ... played down the events. Some prot... have been arrested including Javed But... of Maqbool. Government officials ha... mitted to receiving a steady stream of ... grams, letters and petitions and even ... pressure to take up the issue but the is...

RAVINDRA MHATRE

A Model Son

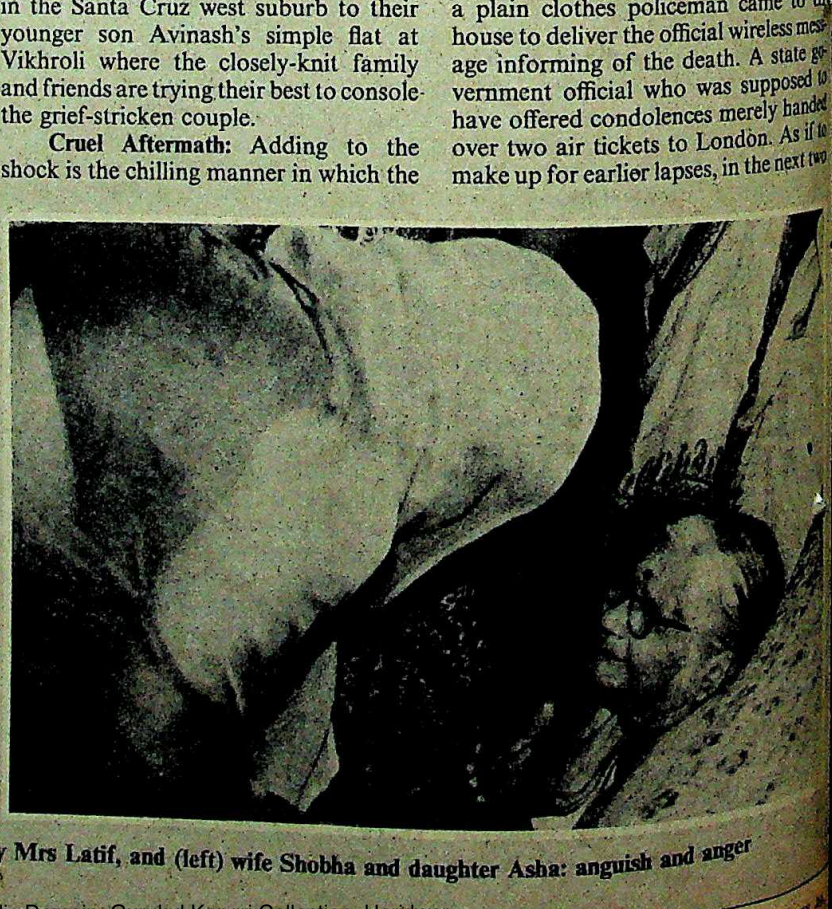
THE MONTH of December passed quietly here. Christmas was not white and we thought it was all over, but now at the end of January the winter storms have burst out with full fury and there is continuous snow and havoc all around."

Ravindra Mhatre who penned these lines in a letter to his old friend Sadashiv Gorakashkar, curator of the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, never realised how eerily apt his words would prove. Just a week after writing the letter, Mhatre was slain by terrorists and his simple middle class Maharashtrian parents back home in Bombay are unable to comprehend why fate with such full fury should strike their once serene lives.

"What is the point of crying before everyone, I am trying to laugh but no one will realise how I feel," Mhatre's 75-year-old father Hareshwar Mhatre, a retired free-lance commercial artist, said dazedly to a friend. But despite his best efforts, the tears keep welling up. His 74-year-old wife, Tarabai, is inconsolably sobbing away for her eldest son, known by his pet name of "Dada". The Mhatre parents have shifted from their modest bungalow in the Santa Cruz west suburb to their younger son Avinash's simple flat at Vikhroli where the closely-knit family and friends are trying their best to console the grief-stricken couple.

Cruel Aftermath: Adding to the shock is the chilling manner in which the family in India received news of the tragedy. It was from the screaming headlines in the morning newspaper that Mhatre's parents discovered that their son had been kidnapped. Next day his brother and sister-in-law heard over the morning ... radio broadcast Mhatre's body had been found even as they were busy dialling the high commission in London to get the latest information. Bureaucratic red tape being what it is, it was only late that evening, when news of the death was already common knowledge all over the city, that a plain clothes policeman came to the house to deliver the official wireless message informing of the death. A state government official who was supposed to have offered condolences merely handed over two air tickets to London. As if to make up for earlier lapses, in the next two

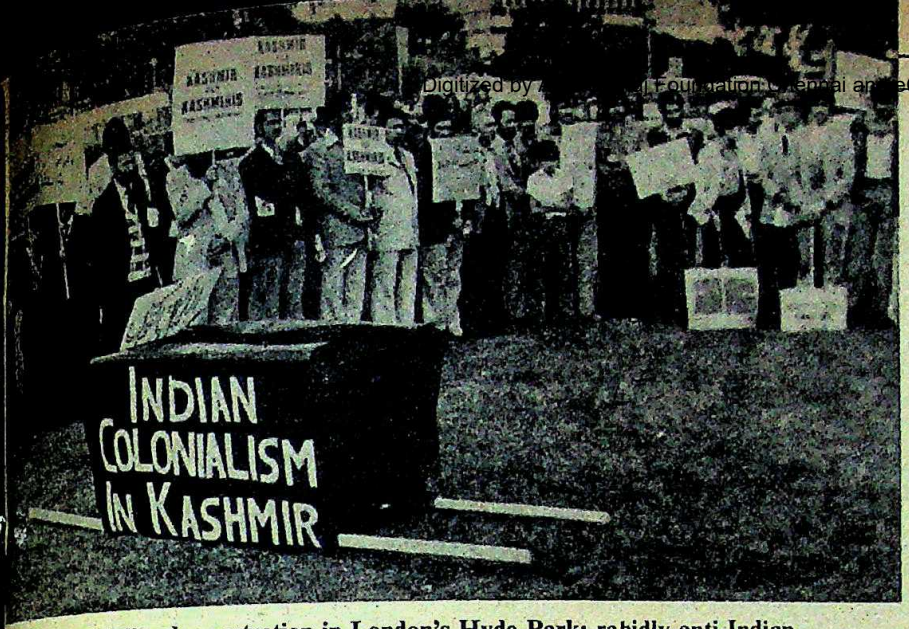




Mhatre's mother being consoled by Mrs Latif, and (left) wife Shobha and daughter Asha: anguish and anger

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JKLF anti-Indian demonstration in London's Hyde Park: rabidly anti-Indian

obviously being kept low key. The Government has decided to let Abdul Rehman, president of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, express Kashmiri feelings.

However, the Pakistani authorities are obviously in no mood to allow any kind of student activism at this stage. On February 10, a day before Butt was hanged, all student unions in Punjab and later Sind, were banned under a martial law ordinance. In addition, the ruling regime is not anxious to add to the current tensions in Indo-Pakistan relations. Officially, the Kashmir issue no longer excites the Pakistanis. They are not prepared to accept the cease-fire line as legitimate. They realise for all practical purposes, the division of Kashmir is a fact of life.

Last week, President Zia told Indian

days several VIP's including Governor I.H. Latif and his wife, Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil and Rajiv Gandhi called to express sympathy. Later Mrs Gandhi also called on the bereaved family.

The house in Santa Cruz which had just been painted a month earlier after many years—so that, as his mother observed to a neighbour, "it will look good when Dada comes home on leave"—is now locked up and silent. Neighbours remember Mhatre as a simple clever boy who never gave his parents a day's anxiety. Always a bright student, he stood third in the matriculation examination and graduated with a first class B.Sc. from the Ismail Yusuf College. After passing the UPSC Assistant Grade examination with flying colours, he joined government service on January 4, 1950.

Sensitive Personality: He was, as a friend recalls: "Simple, almost naive, sincere and honest, without any flare or flamboyance." His mother, a primary teacher at the Poddar School in Santa Cruz, had a great impact on her son as well as on her numerous students who hold her in great esteem. Mhatre himself never smoke or drank. He was interested in a variety of subjects, from history to art and the sciences. While posted in Delhi he obtained diplomas in company law and ...ation from the Bharatiya Vidya Bha...wan. As a boy he was so immersed in books that he was sometime absent-minded about carrying out family chores.

Mhatre brought to his job a rare personal touch. A sobbing woman mourner at Vikhroli recalled how when she was feeling homesick and pregnant in strife-torn Teheran, Mhatre tried to cheer her up by secretly arranging a quiet ceremony to celebrate her seventh month of pregnancy, a custom among Maharashtrians. He had even written to his wife to send a green sari for the function.

Another friend remembers how when he wrote to Mhatre to find out, if possible, about a Dr Tilak from the National Chemical Laboratory who was ill and in hospital in Teheran, Mhatre went from hospital to hospital to locate the man and when he found him, insisted on bringing him to his house. He continuously showed a rare initiative and concern about Indians abroad. When he recognised the famous classical singer Prabha Atre in Teheran, he persuaded her to give a concert as he did with Arun Datte, the Marathi singer. Hundreds of Indian students are indebted to him for the interest he took in advising them about universities abroad.

Eventful Life: Every city in which he was posted, Mhatre got to know intimately. Said a friend: "He could always tell you the restaurant where you got the best kulfi or the shop which had the right goods from India. I remember when he was posted in Dhaka, he found a tailor who stitched a suit for Rs 10. He got one made and wore it proudly."

Ironically, on August 15, 1982, when he was transferred to Birmingham, the family was thrilled because it represented the first safe post after years in trouble-spots. He was in Dhaka in undivided Pakistan at the time of the Indo-Pakistan war in the mid-'60s and was, like other Indians, placed under house arrest. He was in Iran during the thick of the riots when the Shah was removed and Ayatullah Khomeini took over. As a result he was often separated from his family, since Mhatre and his wife Shobha were keen that the education of their only child Asha, now 14, should not suffer. Asha, a bright student, had earlier stayed on in Bombay with her mother to study at St Columba School.

In Birmingham, however, the family was finally together and Asha studied at a local school. Tragically Asha's birthday fell a day after her father was kidnapped. From phone messages to the family in Bombay, it seems the teenager is trying bravely to cope with the situation. She begged her concerned relatives not to phone at odd hours as it disturbed her mother who was not at all well.

Close-knit Family: Asha hopes to be a doctor, a profession which runs in her mother's family. Her grandfather K. Pathare is a doctor and so is her mother and her mother's three sisters and one brother. In fact Shobha's younger sister Shula is married to Mhatre's brother Avinash, also a doctor. Last week Avinash and Shula flew to Birmingham to be with Shobha. Mhatre's younger sister, a physiotherapist in California also flew down.

Although the body was at first expected back almost immediately and there was talk in the press about a state funeral which would be attended by both the President and the prime minister who are in Bombay for the naval reviews, the plans had to be hastily postponed after it was learnt that the British authorities wanted to have a second post-mortem.

One of Mhatre's leisure activities was "bhendia" a Marathi game of reciting couplets with the ending word of a previous poem and very often he composed the poems and sang them. A colleague recalls that a few years back when he visited the Qutub Minar in Delhi, he was so inspired that in Marathi he composed a couplet remarking that as the "Qutub soars loftily into the blue skies, so should a man soar high in his career and attainments". But before he could fulfil those ambitions for himself and his family, Mhatre was cruelly struck down.

—COOMI KAPOOR

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participants in a South Asia Regional Conference in Islamabad that a no-war pact between the two countries would not substitute or bypass the Simla Agreement which Pakistan continued to support. Perhaps for the first time Zia categorically stated that a no-war pact would apply as much to Jammu & Kashmir as to the rest of the Indo-Pakistan border. That does not mean that Pakistan recognised the cease-fire line and the line of actual control as legitimate but that India and Pakistan should avoid adding a warlike solution to the dispute.

Official Views: That, however, is not how the Indian Government sees it. The present thinking in top circles in both the MEA and the Defence Ministry is that Pakistan may not be such an innocent bystander as Islamabad is trying to make it seem. There is suspicion in the minds of the people who matter in the Indian Government that Pakistan is possibly behind the recent trouble in Kashmir, Assam and Punjab—all sensitive border states.

Along with the suspicion is the more disturbing talk of another war with Pakistan on the horizon. Senior officials in the MEA and the Defence Ministry are discussing just such an eventuality. For quite some time now, Mrs Gandhi has been talking about a "foreign hand" wanting to destablise India. Rajiv Gandhi's statement, just before the Mhatre killing, that Pakistan might attack India within a year is not just born out of political expediency but reflects what is currently being talked about in high-level government circles.

Relations between India and Pakistan continue to be tense especially after the Mhatre murder. There are many pinpricks which can provoke either of them to resort to an extreme step. Which is good reason for great caution. The swiftness with which Maqbool Butt's fate was sealed following the Mhatre murder may have raised hackles in Kashmir. But it is suggestive of a new decisiveness that was seen to be lacking in Mrs Gandhi's actions in the recent past.

The tribunals are getting down to work in Assam. The Government is resuming talks with the Akalis. Trouble-makers were promptly arrested in Jammu & Kashmir. It seems Mrs Gandhi is beginning to act at last. The strategy is clearly to neutralise the possible internal trouble spots like Assam, Punjab and Kashmir by softening the stand while at the same time taking quick and decisive action against extremist activity. In Kashmir, that has begun and Punjab is the next target. If the strategy is successful even in some measure, Ravindra Mhatre will not have died in vain.

—DILIP BOBB with BONNY MUKHERJEE in Birmingham, KARAN THAPAR in London and BHABANI SEN GUPTA in Islamabad

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Tremors of Tension

AT TREHGAM, a tiny hamlet in the Kupwara district of Jammu & Kashmir, where Mohammed Maqbool Butt, son of Ghulam Qadir, a tailor, was born 46 years ago, no shop opened for four consecutive days last fortnight. In Anantnag district, at the southern end of Kashmir, a group of youngsters, tears welling from their eyes, went round the schools, banks and government offices, requesting the authorities to close down. At Zainakadal, in the heart of thickly-populated old Srinagar, the streets were deserted even though nobody had given the call for a bandh. "Life in the valley is perfectly normal," read the peppy announcement by the Jammu & Kashmir Government hours after the execution of Butt on February 11 in Tihar Jail in distant New Delhi, for having committed a murder 18 years ago. But Butt's hanging, deferred for obvious political reasons since his rearrest (after his escape in December 1968) in 1976, and then carried out with unseemly haste within three days of the President rejecting his mercy petition, created much more than ripples in the valley of poplars and maples.

To many Kashmiris unconnected with politics, the hanging smacked of pointless revenge. The provocation was all too apparent: Ravindra Mhatre, an Indian diplomat in Birmingham, being kidnapped supposedly by armed Kashmiri secessionists between February 3 and February 5, and Butt's fate being decided on February 8. No one in Kashmir had gloated over Mhatre's killing, but Butt wore the halo of a martyr almost overnight. The convoluted phraseology of the years of the plebiscite movement was back again in the tea-shops, the coffee-houses and the street squares. Abdul Ghani Lone, MLA and chairman of the People's Conference, a party that seeks greater autonomy for Jammu & Kashmir without calling into question the state's accession to India in 1947, summed up the situation: "Maqbool is the first martyr on the question of Kashmir's accession. The Centre and the Government headed by Farooq Abdullah have made a martyr out of him."

Troubled Valley: It was Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah, facing relentless Congress(I) attacks ever since he was elected last June, who had more to fear from Butt's ghost stalking the valley. For his National Conference (NC), the hanging was a body blow to its reputation of being able to control secessionist sentiments. Sitting in the chief minister's bungalow at Jammu, where the capital shifts in winter, Farooq was visibly worried. "The secessionists and the fundamentalists should be dealt with politically, and that's the only way to fight them. Retaliation doesn't pay," he said.

Intelligence reports had reached him that at a *gayebana janaza* (funeral prayer) for Butt held in Srinagar on the day of his execution, slogans had been raised against Mrs Indira Gandhi and Farooq for their "complicity" in the hanging. Quite shaken by the pace of events, Farooq cancelled a scheduled programme of visiting the Kashmir valley on February 11. Ghulam Nabi Butt, Maqbool's brother, was whisked away by state CID men from the Srinagar airport minutes before he was to leave for New Delhi to witness the execution and claim the body.

Lost Opportunity: The state Government could have bought time for Butt. After he was also being tried in Kashmir for the murder of a bank manager at Lunga in 1976, soon after his re-entry into India, the state Government could have taken the plea that Butt's hanging on the basis of his earlier death sentence (for the 1966 murder) would obstruct justice in the second case. But no such plea was taken. When P.P. Nayyar, special secretary in the Union Home Ministry, flew down to Jammu following the President rejecting Butt's mercy petition, the state prosecution authorities, without demur, persuaded Enemy Agents' Judge Pavitar Singh Bhardwaj to sign the "black warrant".

Instead, it was Lone's party, totally opposed to the NC, which took upon itself the task of defending Butt. Muzaffar Hussain Beg, second-in-command of the People's Conference, appeared before a bench of the Supreme Court at the eleventh hour for a stay of the execution. Beg, it was reported, was helped by Ghulam Nabi Hagroo, another leading lawyer and an important member (member) of the Jamait-e-Islami, to draft the petition. The Anantnag demonstrations were reportedly led by the People's League, a small organisation which operates mostly underground and derives inspiration from across the line of actual control. These parties bore the brunt of precautionary arrests: over 400 of the supporters of Jamait-e-Islami, the rabidly fundamentalist Jamiat-e-Tulaba, the Mahaz-e-Azadi and the People's League were picked up by the police.

The Congress(I) leaders of the state had reason to celebrate: Farooq, their political enemy, was for the first time in danger of being condemned by the mainstream Kashmiri Muslim opinion which vigorously supports the Kashmiri *infaradiyat* (identity), suspects that the "Indians" have designs on it, and votes the NC to power believing it

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Farooq Abdullah with Moulvi Farooq: controversial alliance

it alone can safeguard it. Despite Farooq's repeated protestation that "I'm an Indian and I'll die an Indian", the Kashmiri Muslims regard him as a crusader for their cause just as his late father was a crusader. Whereas the Sheikh had the advantage of his personality to keep the militancy in Kashmir society under check, it broke out all too often into the open during the 17 months that Farooq succeeded his father as chief minister.

Disturbing Incidents: The first time that the militants raucously asserted their presence was at the Independence Day parade at the main stadium in Srinagar where, while Farooq was taking the salute, a crude bomb went off. It came to the boil again in October when the one-day cricket match between India and the West Indies was nearly abandoned as agitating hordes broke through the fencing, pelted Indian players with stones and tried to dig up the wicket. Earlier, there were stray scenes of jubilation in various parts of Srinagar on August 14, Pakistan's Independence Day. There was also an attempt to blow up a transmission tower on top of Srinagar's Hari Parbat with high explosives.

These are stray incidents in comparison with the torrent of violence in neighbouring Punjab, but the state Government took an all too leisurely view of it. The stadium case was registered at Shergari police station while the cricket ground case was handled by Kothibagh police station, both in Srinagar.

FOR MONTHS, investigation shuttled between the two police stations and the state CID. Meanwhile the Union Home Ministry began an independent inquiry into the incidents. The Congress(I) simultaneously intensified propaganda that Farooq had been sheltering secessionists, and the unsolved cases became grist to their mill. A vocal section of the Congress(I) leadership meanwhile made out an elaborate case for Farooq's dismissal on this ground: they took the unprecedented step of two Muslim members of the Union Council of Ministers, Ghulam Nabi Azad and Arif Mohammed Khan, taking a deputation to the President requesting him to dismiss Farooq.

Finally, after a crucial meeting with Mrs Gandhi on January 26, Farooq ordered a wave of detentions in the Kashmir valley—some on specific charges, others under the Public Safety Act. Beginning from January 27, virtually the entire top leadership of the Jamait-e-Islami, the Jamait-e-Tulaba, the Mahaz-e-Azadi and the People's League were swept up by the police dragnet. A sizeable number of the militants went underground. However, it is only in the Independence Day bomb case that the police had been able to make a breakthrough earlier. Four persons arrested in this connection were Iqbal Qureshi, Altaf Qureshi, Altaf Mahajan and Majid Lala. Police officials say that at least two of them have "interesting connections". Examples:

► Iqbal is the brother of Hashim Qureshi, hijacker of the Indian Airlines Fokker Friendship Ganga in 1971 and a leader of the Jammu & Kashmir National Liberation Front (JKNLF) (known as the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front in England); and

► Altaf Qureshi is the brother of Ashraf Qureshi, co-hijacker of Ganga.

"This made us sit up for a while," says an official in Srinagar, "because it became clear that the JKNLF had been able to maintain its links here." Later, when Mhatre's kidnappers attempted a half-hearted negotiation by circulating their demands among the media, they wanted the "release" of Iqbal, Altaf Qureshi and Lala—not knowing that both Altaf and Lala were out on bail.

However, among the leaders arrested or detained after January 27 were: Shaifuddin Qari, secretary of the Jamait-e-Islami; Syed Ali Shah Gilani, ex-MLA of the Jamait; Mohammed Farooq Rehman, president of the People's League; and at least 50 second-rank leaders of the Jamait, the Jamait-e-Tulaba, the Mahaz-e-Azadi and the People's League. The pattern of the arrests revealed a blend of half-heartedness and overkill.

The Jamait-e-Islami people formed the majority of those held even though their participation in recent militant activities was nil.

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MAQBOOL BUTT

Death Wish

MOHAMMED Maqbool Butt, hanged in Delhi's Tihar Jail exactly a week before his 46th birthday, was labelled by Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq as a "romantic". He had the swagger and the braggadocio of a romantic—and also the typical romantic streak for self-destruction. If he had not crossed the line of actual control for the second time from Gundi Gram in POK to Kamalkunj in Indian Kashmir in the middle of May, 1976, maybe he would have been settled by now in Birmingham like many of his compatriots, living down a turbulent past, and living off covert subsidies from Pakistan military intelligence.

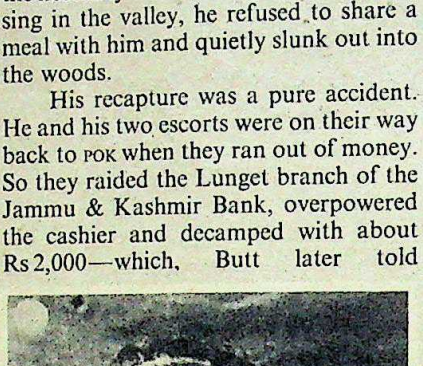
The odds against him were significant. He had already been sentenced to death in Srinagar by Enemy Agents Judge Nilkanth Ganju for having killed Amar Chand, a CID officer by stabbing him 21 times in the early hours of September 12, 1966, at Nadihal, a tiny village in Baramulla district. Four months after the death sentence was awarded in August 1968, Butt dug a tunnel underneath his cell at Srinagar Central Jail and disappeared. In 1976, when he re-entered India, every police station in the state had a copy of his photograph prominently displayed.

Poor Timing: The timing was equally hazardous politically. A year before, Sheikh Abdullah had signed the Kashmir Accord with the centre, and the erstwhile champions of plebiscite had all mellowed. And Butt—as his interrogation reports clearly reveal—had the standing offer from the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI) in Pakistan to be rehabilitated in the UK.

But he would have nothing of it. Early in May, he bid farewell to wife Husmat Zakira, two sons Javed and Shaukat and daughter Lubna at their three-storeyed house in Peshawar's Clock Tower, which had once belonged to an Indian and was given to him by the Pakistan Government. With Rs 800 in Indian currency in his pocket, and escorted by Abdul Hamid and Mohammed Riaz, youngsters from POK, he entered the state where he was born and which he left as late as 1953. "The *chinars* look so much better in this part" he is said to have told a friend who now practises law in Srinagar soon after arrival.

Butt's mission was exploratory this time. He wanted to probe the minds of his friends in Indian Kashmir—to test whether the Kashmir Accord really meant anything to them. He was surprised to notice cold apathy to terrorism among all of them. He was hurt. After a night-long debate with his lawyer friend during which Butt could not convince him about the necessity of fomenting an armed uprising in the valley, he refused to share a meal with him and quietly slunk out into the woods.

His recapture was a pure accident. He and his two escorts were on their way back to POK when they ran out of money. So they raided the Lunget branch of the Jammu & Kashmir Bank, overpowered the cashier and decamped with about Rs 2,000—which, Butt later told



Butt: date with the hangman

police, he would have used to bribe the team's way out of India. The cashier raised an alarm and followed hotfoot. In the melee, the gang fired upon the cashier, killing him on the spot. Ironically, Butt was finally nabbed by his own Kashmiri people who surrounded him, beat him up and took him to the police station.

Terrorist Methods: Tall, wiry and full of humour, Butt believed in terrorism as the only means to "free" his native Jammu & Kashmir. During his first arrest in 1966, the police recovered from him a "declaration of war" on India, drafted by him in rousing but stilted English prose. In 1971, when Ganga, the Indian Airlines Fokker Friendship aircraft was hijacked to Pakistan within minutes of its take-off from Srinagar, Butt was waiting at Lahore airport to receive the hijackers. The hijacking was not taken kindly to by the Pakistanis, because when the empty aircraft was blown up by the hijackers, India promptly denied overflight rights to the Pakistanis. Butt was sentenced to jail for 14 years, but was released after three years.

Butt did his masters in Urdu from Peshawar University. He worked as a reporter in the *Khyber Mail* till he joined politics full-time. It was around this time that he met Amanullah Khan and Farooq Haider, a doctor. Both are Kashmiris from the Pakistan-controlled side of the state. In the early 60's, they formed the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front.

Successive generations of Kashmiri militants operating from Pakistan have met and known Butt intimately. The demand for his release figures in two terrorist strikes: the hijacking of the Indian Airlines plane in 1976, and during last fortnight's kidnapping and eventual slaying of R.H. Mhatre, the Indian diplomat, in Birmingham. In 1974, when Farooq Abdullah, then a British citizen and member of the UK unit of the Plebiscite Front, was in POK (*see story*), Butt accompanied him for a day in the Poonch district. While Farooq shook hands with hundreds of villagers, eager to greet Sheikh Abdullah's son, Butt quietly told him: "I wish I had that hand of yours. Reminisces Farooq: "I think Maqbool had realised the limitations of carrying out politics without having the masses on one's side".

In jail, he had somehow managed to collect a jumbled assortment of possessions. He had a whole stack of papers stuffed into a cardboard carton and nearly Rs 8,000 stashed away in the Tihar Jail treasury. The money remains a mystery. It was sent to him by cheque from England in 1981 and 1982. The first draft (No. 00[illegible] 1069052) for Rs 540 came in April 1981. The second cheque (No. DC 519757) came in September 1982 and was for Rs 22,831. Both were encashable at the State Bank of India, Parliament Street branch, and came through a branch of Lloyds Bank in London.

Awaiting his death, Butt had only recently finished reading Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, which has an evocative account of life in pre-partition Kashmir. He also listened to his transistor radio which brought to him, first, the news of Mhatre's kidnapping and the demand for his release, and then the news of his fate being sealed with Chief Justice Y.V. Chandrachud rejecting his counsel's petition for reprieve. According to his lawyers, his last wish was to be buried in Kashmir but he was buried "for security reasons", with full Islamic rites, inside the premises of Tihar Jail hours after the noose had tightened around his neck.

—SUMIT MITRA and PRABHA DUTT

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On the other hand, the police could not apprehend the three loudest champions of Kashmiri separatism, such as:

- Shabir Ahmed Shah, the People's League leader, whose name figures repeatedly in the interrogation reports of Maqbool Butt as his accomplice. Shah is an accused in the cricket match case;
- Bashir Ahmed Butt, main organiser of the Mahaz-e-Azadi; and
- Tajumul Islam, chief of the Jamait-e-Mulba which, like the Mahaz-e-Azadi, publicly opposes Kashmir's accession into India.

However, by ordering the arrests, visibly under pressure from the Centre, Farooq drew flak from within Kashmir as he had never done before. Earlier, when the Congress(I) was gunning for him both within and outside the state, he could always turn for succour to the hard core Kashmiri Muslim society. But, by giving in to Central pressure, Farooq became almost a co-accused. "The Centre and Farooq Abdullah are together defaming the Muslims of Kashmir," said Lone in the state Assembly. "I have full confidence in myself and my own people," said Farooq.

Controversial Past: But the noose seemed to be tightening around him all the same. On one hand, militant groups and their leaders, who were—according to a police officer—"not even known to their neighbours till the other day", became household names in the valley overnight. On the other hand, the all-India image of Farooq as champion of Kashmir's integration into India suffered a rude jolt as the Congress(I), barely concealing its glee, began ferreting out evidence of his earlier association with the JKNLF and other secessionist groups.

Some of the facts about Farooq's (and the Abdullah family's) close association with the secessionist movement in Kashmir are bound to be uncomfortable now. For example, Mohammed Shafi Qureshi, former Union minister, mentioned immediately after Mhatre's kidnapping that Farooq had addressed a meeting at Srinagar's Lal Chowk in 1974 with Amanullah Khan. Farooq told INDIA TODAY: "I don't remember that. Amanullah Khan was present." But he was unduly coy, because Amanullah Khan had been permitted by the Union government in 1974 to go around Kashmir and suggest a solution to the Kashmir dispute. Said Moulvi Farooq, mirroring Kashmir and the chief minister's controversial ally: "Both Dr Farooq Abdullah and Amanullah Khan had visited my house in 1974. This was with the permission of the Government of India. What's wrong with that?"

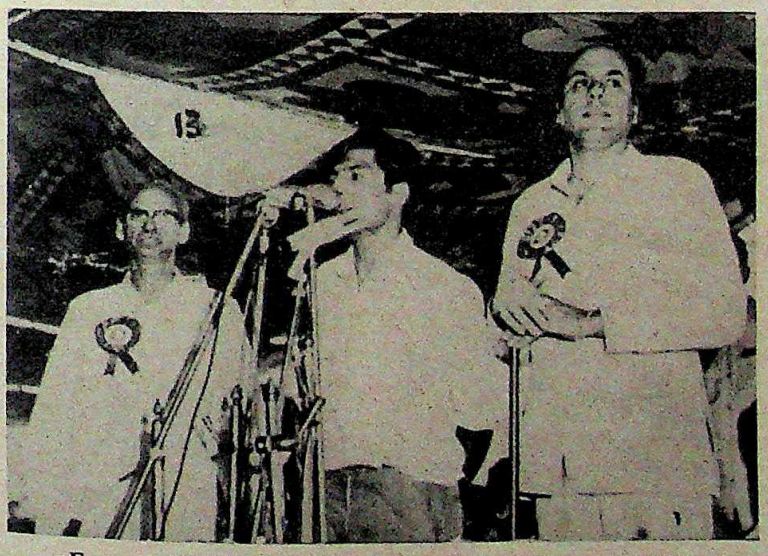
Nothing except that Farooq is still trying hard to live down the fact that until the Kashmir Accord of 1975, when the Sheikh and Mrs Gandhi "settled" the Kashmir problem with the former fully agreeing to the 1947 accession of the former princely state—total area including Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK) 222,000 sq km—the family, including Farooq, had been preaching rai shumari, or plebiscite. As late as 1974, Farooq was invited to Pakistan by the late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who organised a lavish reception for him in POK. At a public rally in Mirpur (*see photo*), one of the main towns of POK, he shared the podium with none other than Ashraf Qureshi, the hijacker belonging to JKNLF.

Says Farooq about his 1974 visit to Pakistan: "It was basically a convention of the Plebiscite Front. At that time, we were all trying to find a solution to the Kashmir problem. It is a fact that I met many Kashmiri militants at that time. I even met Maqbool Butt there—at Bagh, a small town in the Pakistan-occupied part of Poonch. He was with me when I shook hands with villagers. I found him to be a romantic—like Che Guevara."

Congress Record: But for the Congress(I) it is merely the pot calling the kettle black. Shafi Qureshi, for instance, led the fanatical fringe of the student organisations in Kashmir in 1947 which supported the military invasion from Pakistan. In that year, he founded the "Pakistan Students' Federation" in Kashmir. In 1951, he became an important worker of Political Conference, led by Mohiuddin Kara, which preached Jammu & Kashmir's 'de-accession' from India and accession to Pakistan.

The state CID report (10865/CID) of September 12, 1955, details the activities of Shafi Qureshi, by then the vice-president of Political Conference, aimed at "encouraging secessionist activities" and "advocating the cause of Jammu & Kashmir merging in Pakistan". Finally, by a cabinet order (IS-93-D/56) on September 22, 1956, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, the erstwhile prime minister of the state who is regarded by present-day Congressmen as a "nationalist", go Shafi Qureshi detained under the Preventive Detention Act.

Moulana Iftikhar Mohammed Hussein Ansari, the leader of the Congress(I) Legislature Party now, and a strident critic of Farooq for leading the state to the brink of secession, was the founder of Shia Youth Federation, an adjunct of the Plebiscite Front led by Sheikh Abdullah and the late Mirza Afzal Beg. The Shias of Srinagar still remember his fire-eating speeches every year on *youm-e-siah* (Black Day), or August 9, the day in 1953 when the Central Government moved into action to arrest Sheikh Abdullah and replace him with Bakshi as the prime minister of the state.



Farooq with hijacker Ashraf Qureshi in Pakistan in 1974

"It was basically a convention of the Plebiscite Front. At that time we were all trying to find a solution to the Kashmir problem. It is a fact that I met many Kashmiri militants at that time. I even met Maqbool Butt there—at Bagh, a small town in the Pakistan-occupied part of Poonch. He was with me when I shook hands with villagers. I found him to be a romantic—like Che Guevara."

—Farooq Abdullah about his 1974 visit to Pakistan

Strong Currents: The reality of the Kashmir situation till 1975 was that, except for a few trusted families—like the Bakshi family, the Sadiq family and Syed Mir Qasim, chief minister till 1975—and Mufti Mohammed Syed, a conscious integrationist and the present president of the state Congress(I), the Congress at the Centre had no real ally in the Kashmir valley. The war cry of the valley was plebiscite, and the messiah was the Sheikh. Says Bakshi Bashir, son of the Bakshi and a businessman unconnected with politics: "It is an undeniable fact that when the Kashmiris said plebiscite in those days, they meant independence."

The Sheikh rode to power playing on these emotions and using them though not necessarily softening them. By the sheer strength of his personality, he could order an arrangement in Kashmir society where those who were regarded as se-

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Shafi Qureshi: murky past

cessionists till the other day could be rehabilitated without any stigma attached. The Al Fatah conspirators (*see box*), for instance, were well settled after the Sheikh had withdrawn the case against them. Gradually, a system was about to emerge when those who had sought independence for Jammu & Kashmir could get evenly distributed on two sides of the new fence, as the ruling party and the opposition.

For the Sheikh, the period following his re-assumption of power in Jammu & Kashmir in 1975 was marked by a long tightrope walk. In 1977, when the Janata Party at the Centre thought that it could take on the Sheikh on his home, he mobilised his people again in the slogan of Kashmiri identity being in peril, and won a decisive victory. With Mrs Gandhi's return, the two leaders marked off their territories and were on their way to hammer out a workable arrangement for cooperation.

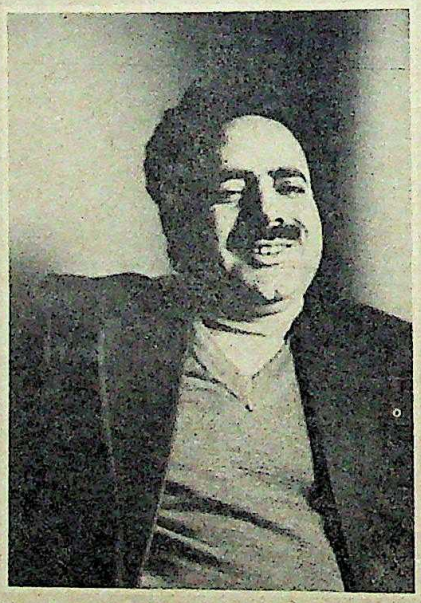
Farooq took over the helm at this crucial juncture in Kashmir's chequered history, when the Sheikh had initiated the psychological process of the state's integration into India but had not yet completed it. The Jamait-e-Islami, the Jamait-e-Tulaba, the Mahaz-e-Azadi and the People's League were subdued by the Skeikh's popularity—but they were obviously biding their time. But perhaps the biggest stumbling block in the way of the urban Kashmiris' identification with the masses in India (Muslim population: 11 crore in 1981) was Moulvi Farooq's outfit, operating from the sprawling Jama Masjid on the outskirts of Srinagar: a massive edifice built on 28 kanals of land, and raised on 380 deodar poles. More than 50,000 people can assemble in the central congregation hall of the masjid.

The moulvi's ancestors, preachers from Iran who had accompanied Mir Syed Ali Hamadani, the man who converted the Kashmiris to Islam 600 years ago, moved from their settlement at Tral into Srinagar and were housed at Mirwaiz Manzil in Srinagar 200 years ago. The Dogra rulers of Kashmir, ever eager to have a Kashmiri Muslim leader to deal with, invested the mirwaiz with an aura for their own convenience. In 1931, Yusuf Shah, the then mirwaiz, formed the Muslim Conference with the Sheikh, then an obscure teacher at a school in Soura, his birthplace 25 km from Srinagar. In 1938, the mirwaiz and the Sheikh parted company as the Sheikh wanted the organisation to be renamed National Conference. As the NC slid more and more towards a collision with the maharajas, the house of the mirwaiz got increasingly hostile towards the Sheikh.

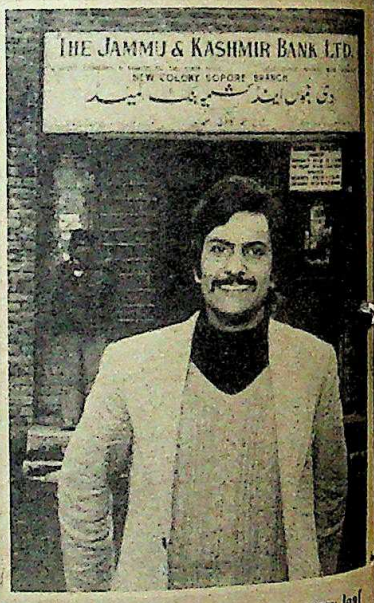
The present mirwaiz belongs to a generation of political priests. His uncle, Yusuf Shah, walked across to POK in 1947, never to return. A strong advocate of Jammu & Kashmir's accession to Pakistan, Yusuf became president of POK twice, in 1950 and in 1961. Yusuf, who died in Muzaffarabad in 1968 at the age of 66, was a rabid India-hater. But, more than that, he hated the Sheikh. Even Jawaharlal Nehru tried to use him once when he gave Yusuf permission to enter India in 1958. He crossed the W border and waited at Amritsar for clear to enter Kashmir. But Bakshi, always cious of potential rivals, did not let him his state.

Basic Differences: Moulvi Farooq came the mirwaiz in 1961 when he was 17 and yet to imbibe Quranic lore in full he was quick to realise the political im tance of his seat. With the Sheikh in pr and a power vacuum in the state, the mo formed his Awami Action Committee 1963 with a strong slogan of de-acce from India and with a subtle tilt towar cession to Pakistan. The basic difference tween the Sheikh and the moulvi was o question of this tilt: the Sheikh, at that simply demanded for the people of the the right to decide their own fate.

G.M. Shah, the Sheikh's son-in-law



Ghulam Rasool Zehgeer: "not in politics"



DARLY

Salim Gilkar: turning over a new leaf

The Al Fatah Angle

OF ALL the subversive and espionage groups unearthed in Jammu & Kashmir, Al Fatah is the biggest. It was a guerilla outfit, comprising over 200 people, which began operating around the middle of 1970. The group recruited youngsters, set up 'safe houses', and embarked on gun-running on a large scale. Heavily financed by Pakistan, its leader was Ghulam Rasool Zehgeer, a Plebiscite Front activist from Srinagar. On January 2, 1971, the group looted the University branch of the Jammu & Kashmir Bank. Following its trail, the members were arrested and their arms and documents were seized.

The trial of Zehgeer and 21 other Al Fatah accused was abruptly terminated as Sheikh Abdullah, on assuming office in 1975, decided to drop the case. Earlier the accused were defended by the late Mirza Afzal Beg, the Sheikh's closest associate in the Plebiscite Front, and Pyarelal Handoo, the present law minister in the Cabinet headed by Farooq Abdullah. The Al Fatah conspirators, many of whom support the National Conference (NC) now, have all been rehabilitated in life, with no stigma about their past. Examples:

► Ghulam Rasool Zehgeer, 41, is now a prosperous forest lessee whose firm

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a close confidant for 40 years, who was expelled from the party by Farooq last year and is now triggering dissent within the party, is right when he says: "The moulvi is a walking negation of all the values that the Sheikh stood for. The Sheikh wanted him to remain a mere religious figure, and reduced him to the leader of a few back-lanes of Srinagar."

However, last April, when talks between the NC and the Congress(I) for an electoral understanding broke down, Farooq was in frantic need of allies in the state's 'Islam' lobby. He took a rather drastic step by enlisting the moulvi's support. Hindu opinion in Jammu rallied entirely against Farooq as a result of this alliance. But its long-term effect was felt later when the Congress(I) as well as Farooq's recent detractors within the family, brother Tariq Abdullah, 46, and Shah, used it as a stick to beat Farooq.

Shifting Friendships: The chief minister had obviously met the moulvi more than half-way because, though the moulvi benefited from the alliance, he was not prepared to do anything by which the communal stigma on him could be lessened. He recently toured south India where he addressed a series of public meetings, fulminating against the Centre in speeches, which, however, were carefully couched in secular idioms. But, as regards the accession of Jammu & Kashmir, he has not changed his mind. When asked specifically about his views his terse reply was: "I don't want to discuss the subject."

However, the Congress(I) has little moral right to criticise the moulvi because it had tried hard to befriend him ever since it returned to power at the Centre in 1980. The moulvi recalls that Rajiv Gandhi, accompanied by Vijay Dhar, his friend and son of the late D.P. Dhar, had visited his palatial house near Nagin Lake as late as 1982. In September 1980, the Congress(I) Government had even done him a special favour: by an order of the Income Tax Department, donations to his massive Anjuman-i-Nusratul Islam trust (1981-82 budget: Rs 11.41 lakh) was exempted from income tax under the special section 80G of the Income Tax Act (No. CIT/HG/ASR/1/28/-A/5045 dated September 11, 1980). The curious aspect of the order was that the exemption was granted to the trust without checking his accounts and for three years up to March 31, 1983.

Soon after the exemption period ended, however, it became clear that the moulvi would turn down offers of alliance with the Congress(I). As the NC-Moulvi Farooq alliance got going, the Congress(I) true to its style, issued another letter through the Income Tax Department (No. 595 dated January 5, 1984) asking him to produce his books of account and explain why the exemption should not be withdrawn.

Old Ghosts: The politics of Kashmir valley is one tiresomely long chronicle of convenient alliances and dissimulation. Cutting across all party lines, the patriots of today were almost invariably the patrons of secession in the past. Nor is there any assurance that they will not turn a full circle later. The 1975 accord was the expression of the tired old Sheikh's desire to regain the control levers—at a price which nobody knows if the people were prepared to pay. The basic issue —whether the Kashmiri Muslim would like to be ruled by New Delhi—was merely swept under the carpet.

"Only time and patience," says a former adviser to the prime minister, himself a Kashmiri, "can heal the wounds of the state." But Mrs Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, and their associates in the state are in no mood to allow Farooq any breathing space at all. And, being inexperienced in politics, Farooq is liable to take the wrong steps and to press the panic button to summon the genie of communalism. But only the Sheikh knew how to put the genie back in the bottle.

As the winter snow recedes from the peaks of Pir Panjal, there is a fear of politics in the valley hardening along communal lines. Fundamentalist groups are already active in the campuses of colleges and universities, in seemingly innocuous social organisations, even among government staff. There is also encouragement from the other side of the line of actual control. In the event of Farooq being dislodged, it is this section that will reap the benefits. Mrs Gandhi will then bear the responsibility of unleashing strange demons on the scene without knowing how to recall them.

—SUMIT MITRA in Srinagar



Yusuf Mir: a new image

Yaqoot Joinery, in Anantnag, has an annual turn-over of well over Rs 40 lakh. "I'm no longer in politics," says Zehgeer, but adds with a frown, "there can be no solution to the Kashmir problem without involving Azad Kashmir where our brothers live."

► Abdul Rashid Dar, 30, is now a loyal supporter of Farooq Abdullah. A lawyer in Anantnag, Dar is now the district president of the Youth NC, youth wing of the ruling party.

► Fazle Haq Qureshi, after his release, drifted into rabidly fundamentalist organisations. Maqbool Butt's interrogation report indicates that he was the person whom Butt met at Sopore on May 30. However, Qureshi was given a job by the Sheikh Abdullah government. He now works in the state Education Department at Jammu.

► Mohammed Yusuf Mir, an Al Fatah militant, now runs a photo shop in downtown Srinagar where he takes pictures of tourists dressed in the traditional Kashmiri pheran.

► Hamidullah Bhat, yet another activist, is now the assistant registrar of Kashmir University.

► Mohammed Hussein, a member of the Al Fatah armed wing, is now the district horticulture officer at Anantnag.

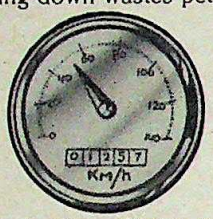
► Mohammed Salim Gilkar, a "theoretician" of the organisation, now works in Sopore, not far from the famous Gulmarg peak, at the local branch of the same Jammu & Kashmir Bank which his group had looted 13 years ago.

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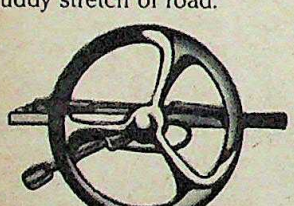
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You could be consuming up to 20% more fuel due to incorrect gear shifting. So make sure that you drive in the right gear.
Always start in first gear, unless you're going downhill or driving on a muddy stretch of road.

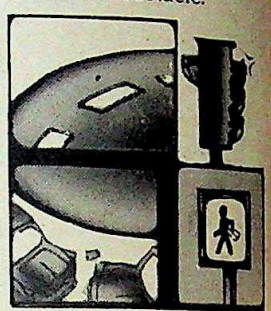


Change to second gear when you're sure that the engine will not struggle. Get into top gear as soon as you can and stay in it for as long as possible.
For Indian cars, change to second gear at 11 kmph, third gear at 17 kmph and fourth gear at 25 kmph.
Use the same gear for going downhill as for coming uphill.

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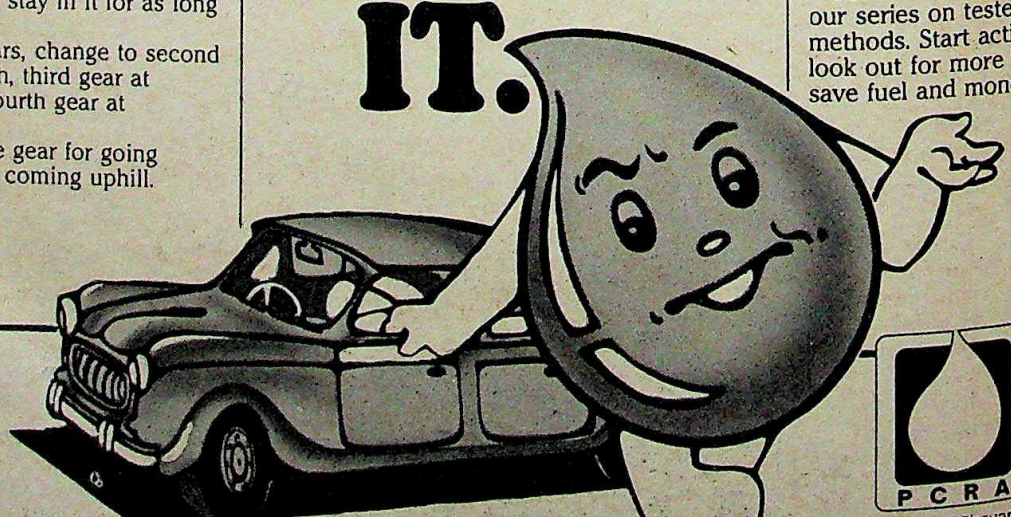
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Use your clutch only when you change gears. Riding the clutch causes loss of energy and damages clutch linings.
Anticipate stops and corners. Slow down well before you reach a red light or an obstacle.



When stopping on an incline, use the hand brake or foot brake. Switch off the engine at longer halts.
Don't manipulate the clutch and accelerator pedals to stay stationary, because it wastes fuel.

DON'T WAIT FOR YOUR CAR TO WARM UP.
Instead, drive in low gear till the engine warms up. That way, your car is at least getting you somewhere!
Don't use the choke longer than necessary.
Park your car so that you can drive out forward. Cold starting and reversing immediately imposes additional strain on the engine. This can use up a surprising amount of fuel.

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"We have noted a change of mood in New Delhi"
—Harchand Singh Longowal



"I want no confrontation with the Akalis"
—Indira Gandhi

PUNJAB

Mood of Optimism

LAST fortnight's state-wide bandh called by the Akali leadership in Punjab somehow seemed symbolic of the 18-month-long war of attrition: boarded up shop fronts, empty streets and armed Akalis guarding government office entrances while the state security forces maintained a discreet distance. But in other ways the bandh symbolised happier tidings. On the whole, it was peaceful and peace appeared to be finally round the corner.

In a dramatic move, Mrs Gandhi issued an invitation on the eve of the bandh to the Akali leadership for tripartite talks to put an end to the vexatious Punjab problem. The invitation came after a 100-minute meeting between Mrs Gandhi and opposition leaders in New Delhi one day before the bandh was due to take place. The timing could not have been better. Both sides are evidently tiring of the protracted confrontation and with the moderates among the Akalis seemingly gaining the upper hand, there could not have been a better moment for talks.

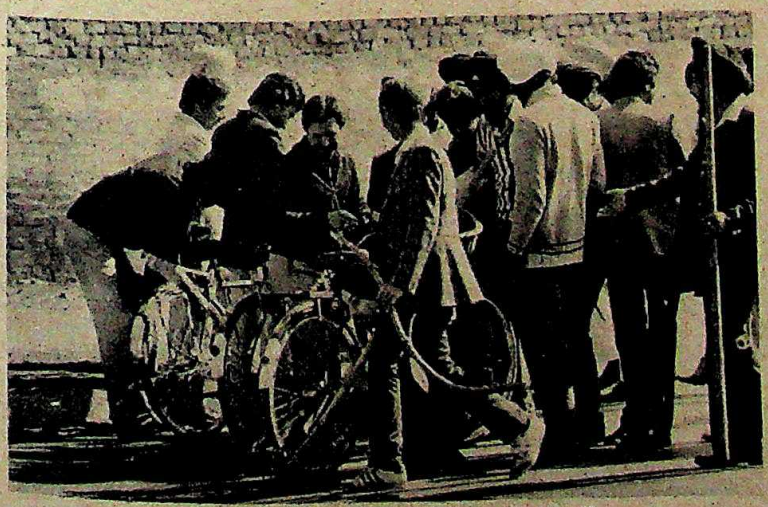
In fact, the invitation immediately injected a new mood of optimism among the Akalis. Said a beaming Akali chief Harchand Singh Longowal: "We have noted a change of mood in New Delhi." Other Akali leaders were more cautious in their reactions but agreed that there is now a new ray of hope on the horizon.

For the moderates who are now engaged in their own internal battle with the brooding Bhindranwale and his die-hard militants, the fact that other opposition leaders will be part of the talks was a major victory. The presence of leaders representing all national parties will certainly give the talks the requisite credibility. But equally important from the Akali viewpoint was Mrs Gandhi's changing attitude on several issues that augur well for the coming negotiations.

For the first time, Mrs Gandhi has declared that she is prepared to refer all territorial disputes, including Chandigarh, Abohar and Fazilka, to a special commission and accept any bilateral agreement arrived at between Punjab and Haryana. Similarly, the waters dispute could be referred to a tribunal headed by a Supreme Court judge. She also offered the Akalis another option on the Chandigarh dispute between the two states. Either her original idea of giving Chandigarh to Punjab and Abohar and Fazilka tehsils to Haryana could be implemented or even a 65:35 division of Chandigarh which "does not alter its architectural character" could be considered.

Even more encouraging was her assertion that "I want no confrontation with the Akalis". Despite the fate of earlier bilateral and tripartite talks, the new concessions have found ready favour with the Akalis. "For the first time, there has been a business-like approach to the talks," says former Union minister and key Akali negotiator Surjit Singh Barnala.

The Akalis were considerably encouraged by the opposition leaders' firm no to Mrs Gandhi's suggestion that the Akalis be asked to suspend their morcha before the talks could begin. Instead, they joined her in issuing an appeal to all sections in Punjab to prevent any further violence. Significantly, there was no pre-condition for the talks.



Deflating bicycle tyres during the bandh

Secret Meetings: Though the latest move came as something of a surprise to most, for experienced Punjab-watchers a softening of attitudes was clearly in the air. For the last two weeks, hectic and secret parleys have been going on almost continuously at various levels. Before Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) President Gurcharan Singh Tohra met Rajiv Gandhi for

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high level secret meetings, several rounds of discussions had already taken place between Union Minister for Works and Housing Buta Singh and Akali leaders in Chandigarh, Ludhiana and Jalandhar. Said a senior Akali leader present at the meetings: "The earlier secret contacts laid the foundation for the right atmosphere for the talks and this has given us considerable hope."

The optimism was, for once, hardly marred by the sinister shadow of Bhindranwale. The widening gulf is being seen as a final attempt to isolate him and the hardliners to allow the moderate to assert themselves as the sole negotiating force. Longowal's recent admission that there were fundamental differences between him and Bhindranwale has obviously taken effect. "Bhindranwale had suggested that motorcycles and arms be purchased on a large scale for killing members of a particular community," says Longowal. "We Sikhs love peace and communal harmony more than anyone else."

Yet, the problem of containing the hardliners is no easy one and their capacity for creating mischief still hovers threateningly in the winter air. It was demonstrated to some extent when Randhir Singh Cheema, acting president of the Talwandi Akali Dal, demanded that five senior Akali leaders (Longowal, Prakash Singh Badal, Tohra, Jagdev Singh Talwandi and himself) should undertake a fast unto death for realisation of the Anandpur Sahib resolution, declare a parallel government and hand over command to Bhindranwale. "The Sikh masses have made enough contribution. Let the leaders now come forward," challenged Cheema.

Violent Measures: On another level, their capacity for violence cannot be underestimated either. During the last fortnight, a major bomb blast killed three people and injured 23 in a cinema in Jalandhar; five people were gunned down in an attempted bank robbery in Hoshiarpur district and grenades were thrown at Amritsar's TV centre and a BSF picket. More serious was the case of *Indian Express* correspondent Sanjeev Gaur who was stabbed outside Amritsar's Golden Temple. He was lucky to survive the attack but it indicated that the media had become fair game for the extremists.

But even with that threat looming over Punjab, the bandh clearly proved that the problem is on the threshold of a solution. Except for stray incidents, the Akali leadership showed themselves in control of the situation by ensuring that it went off peacefully and bringing the hardliners to heel. Latest indications are that the talks will take place on February 14, before Parliament reopens, and the negotiators are not the only ones who will be hoping that the bloody confrontation of the past 18 months will soon be just a tragic memory. —GOBIND THUKRAL

LINK CANAL

Drying up

IT WAS one of those projects that seem doomed from the very start. Last fortnight, the Haryana Government's eight-year-old dream of a 112 km link canal to divert 6,500 cusecs of water every year to farms in the state, evaporated further following an order by the Punjab governor to disband the Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal project organisation. The order immediately resurrected the verbal battle between the two states with each accusing the other of reneging on their part of the original agreement.

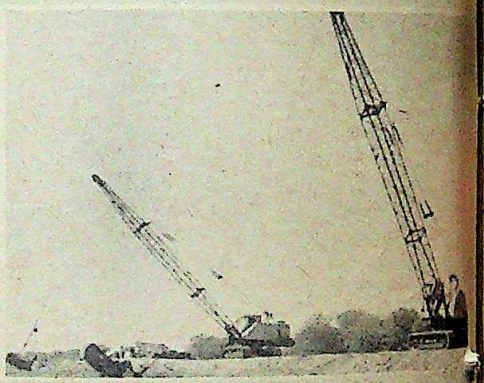
After Central Government orders in 1976 which allotted Punjab and Haryana equal shares in the disputed river waters, Haryana built its 75 km link canal at a cost of Rs 30 crore. In addition, distributary canals were constructed at an additional cost of Rs 120 crore. But the project got stuck soon after when Punjab refused to construct its section on the grounds that it had not received its due share. Even though the Haryana Government appealed to the Supreme Court it was only in December 1981 that the earlier order was rescinded and the waters reallocated. Haryana's share remained at 3.5 million acre feet (MAF), while Punjab was given 0.72 MAF more.

Little Work: Despite the concession, little progress has been made on the Punjab portion of the link canal. Complains Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal: "We knew the political compulsions but still hoped that Punjab, our elder brother, will be more gracious this time and dig the canal. We now feel cheated." A dozen odd meetings with Central Water and Power Commission members and the Union Irrigation Ministry did not help. "We have been shuttling between Punjab and Delhi with little success," says S.S. Surjewala, Haryana's irrigation and power minister. Over the last two years, Haryana has contributed Rs 20.5 crore besides Rs 95 lakh for machinery to draw its 3.5 MAF of water, all to no avail.

Punjab, on the other hand, has only completed 3 km of earth work in Patiala district. Even proceedings for the acquisition of land for the project have not been finalised. Money sanctioned for the project has mainly been utilised to pay salaries to the army of 3,400 SYL project workers. Plans were also being considered to change the original alignment plan of the canal, purportedly to irrigate lakh acres of barren land in Ropar and Patiala—a move that would only have escalated the project cost to Rs 218 crore.

The Punjab administration shrugs off all responsibility for the existing situation. Argues Tejindra Khanna, irrigation and power secretary: "The present SYL organisation was set up by the Government to undertake works estimated at Rs crore to Rs 90 crore during the last two years and for next year's budget it has a provision of only Rs 35 crore. Under the circumstances it is unwise to keep the present level of the SYL organisation."

Incorrect Allegations: Punjab also disagrees with Haryana's assertion that this is causing an annual loss of a million



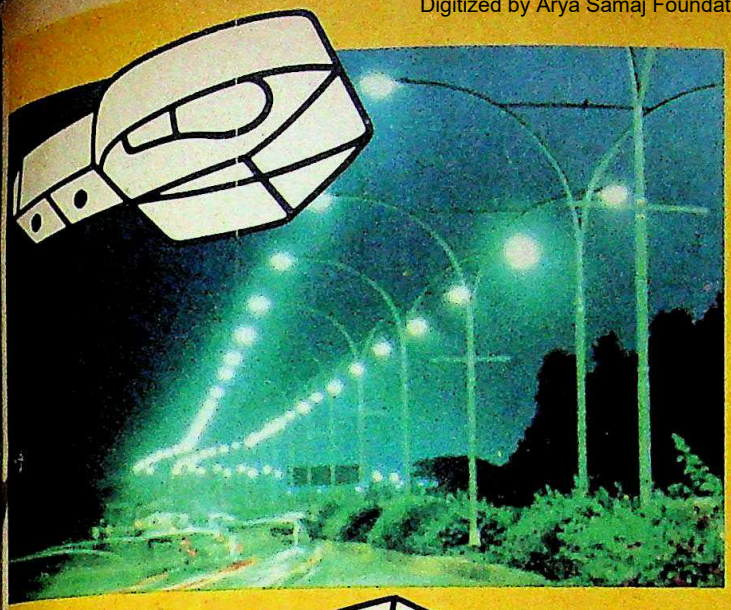
Work in progress on the canal: broken promises

tonnes in foodgrains, besides an overall loss of Rs 100 crore in agricultural production. "The claim is totally untenable. Haryana's 3.5 MAF share is from three rivers—Ravi, Beas and Sutlej—and since the Ravi is yet to be dammed to stop the flow of water to Pakistan, it cannot claim total share," says an irrigation official. The records of the Bhakra-Beas management board show that Haryana has been drawing 50 to 60 per cent of its share from the Ravi, through the existing channels. What it does not get is the right quantities of water during sowing and replanting.

The governor's order of disbanding cannot but please the Akalis who have always been opposed to the project. Says former chief minister Prakash Singh Badal: "The Government could dig the canal over our bodies alone. I am happy that the organisation has been disbanded. But what a waste of resources. The Centre ought to first justly settle the issue and then excavate the canal." Bhajan Lal feels that the only way out lies with Mrs Gandhi. "I have placed all facts before her and she had promised us justice." Punjab, no doubt, would dispute Bhajan Lal's definition of "justice". —GOBIND THUKRAL

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The Safari—an enduring warm-weather favourite—slips back into the fashion mainstream in Summer '84.

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These designers have taken the athletic ease, crisp lightness and relaxed elegance of the safari and within this framework created three distinct styles with built-in business or pleasure adaptability.

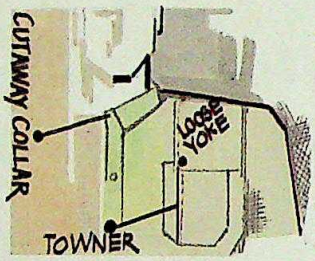


Anil K. Arora, Gopal Sons, New Delhi.

The Corporate Safari

The Jacket: The cut, a cross between that of a coat and a shirt. **It's called the safari cut.** Length: long enough to cover the crotch. A pointed or cutaway shirt collar (6.3 cms.), a change for the better. A 0.6 cm. front placket may maintain a discreet presence.

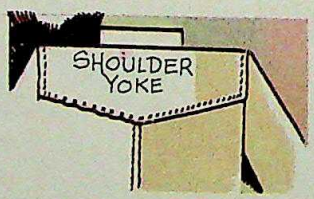
Top pockets (with towners) measuring 14 × 16.5 cms. Bottom pockets: 16.5 × 20.3 cms. with or without flaps.

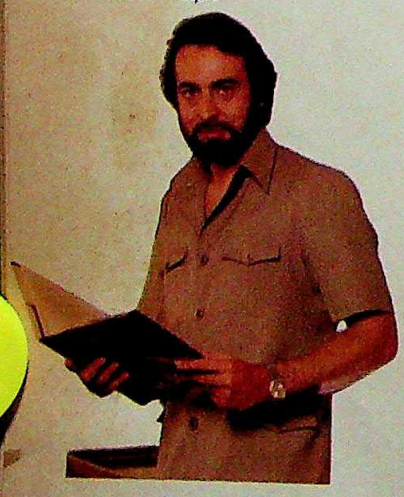


Shoulder and sleeve epaulettes are out. But a shoulder yoke assisted by a vertical towner or vertical twin towners will help you carry your corporate burden with ease.

Half back belts are out of fashion.

The bottom of the safari jacket is split with a vent or two side vents for added comfort.





The Trouser: The pleated look is back. I recommend a fused waistband (3.8 cms.) with 6 loops and an extension belt (6.4 cms). French or side pockets are fine. The trouser must be loose at the thigh and tapered at the ankle for easy movement. Bottoms: 46-48 cms.

Colours: Office Grey, Business Blue, Beige, Offwhite, White and Brown.



S.K. Chaudhary, Perfection, Calcutta.

The Sunset Safari

For relaxed elegance, start with an open or shirt collar. Vertical towners on the front will give extra definition to the word cool. 3 Big (bellow) pockets. 1 at the top & 2 at the bottom.

A loose yoke hanging over the top pocket doubles up as a dummy flap.

Go formal with full, and casual with half sleeves.

Airforce Blue, Olive and Wine are the right colours to assure you a cool successful evening.

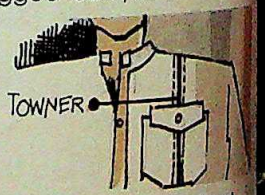




Kishore Bajaj, Bada Saab, Bombay.

The Casual Safari

'84 is gonna be the year of the safari. For young friends like you, I have designed a summer surprise with endless possibilities. Stylised blousons, double breasted fronts, short jackets, double breasted and asymmetrical fronts with piratical styling, jackets that are unstructured or semi-structured with a broad shoulderline for the rugged look you'll love.



Everything is oversized including the pockets.

You can have pockets everywhere, including the sleeves. You can also accessorize the jacket with ropes, studs, zips. Collars range from no collars to Chinese bands to shirt collars.

Trousers can be worn short, rolled up or highlighted by waist treatments like drawstrings, wide waist-bands etc.

The Earthy colours are the best. Khaki, Military Green, Airforce Blue, White is also right.

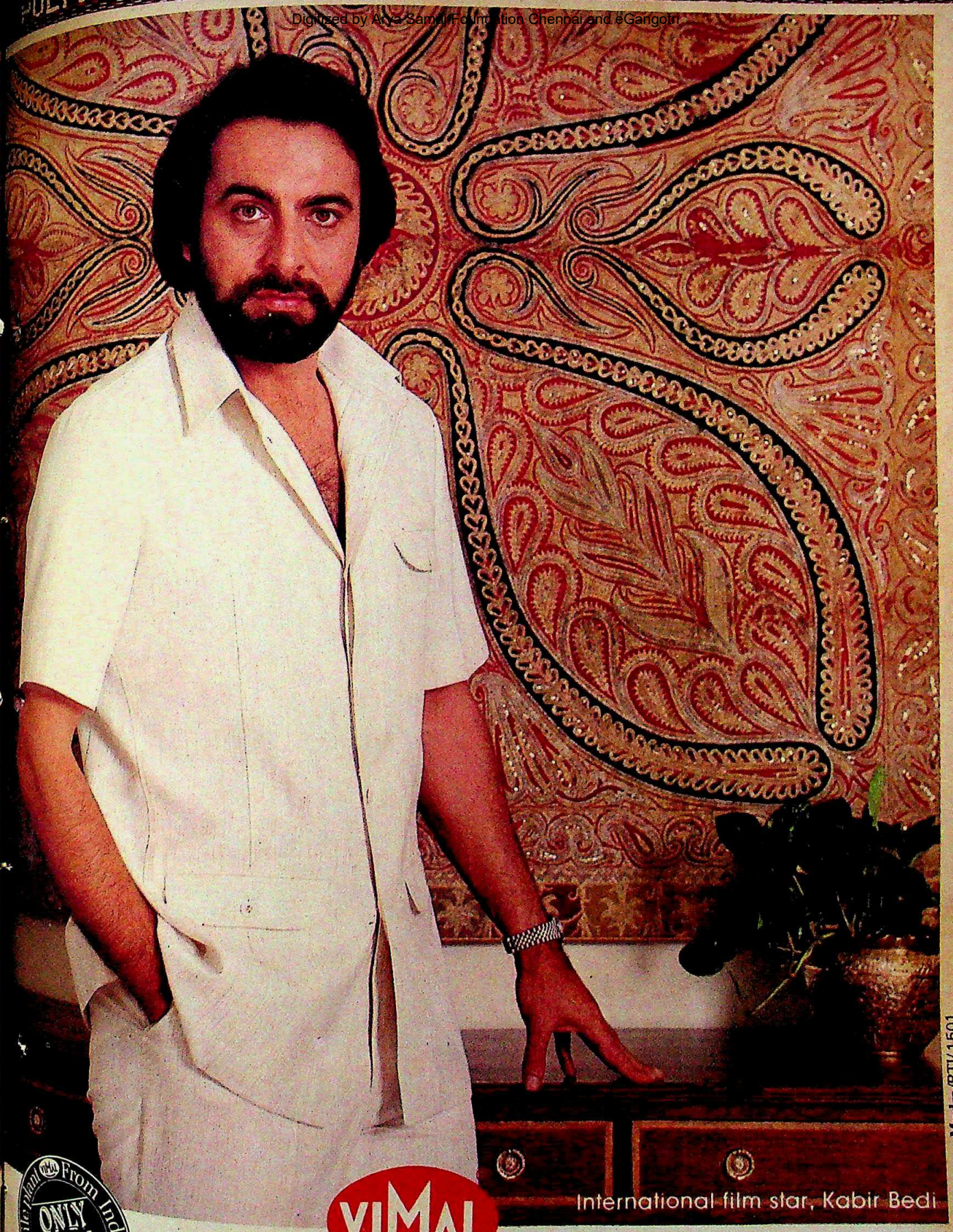
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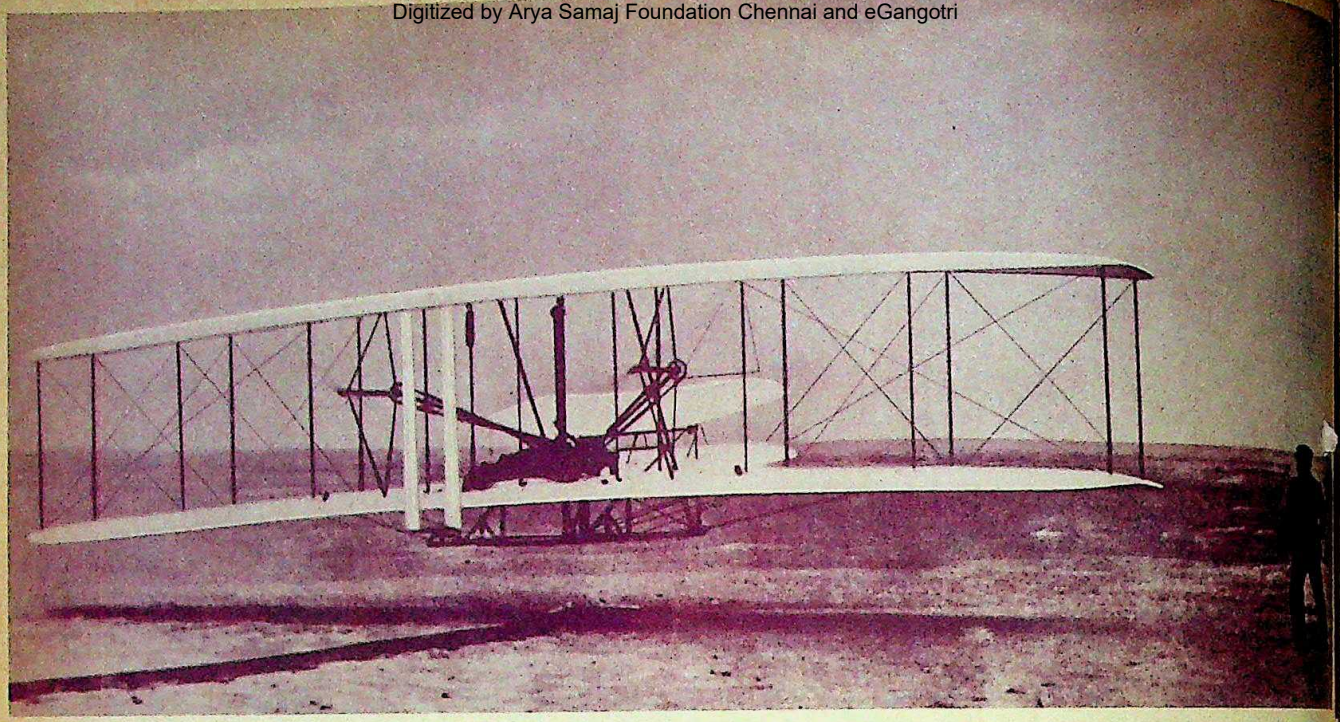
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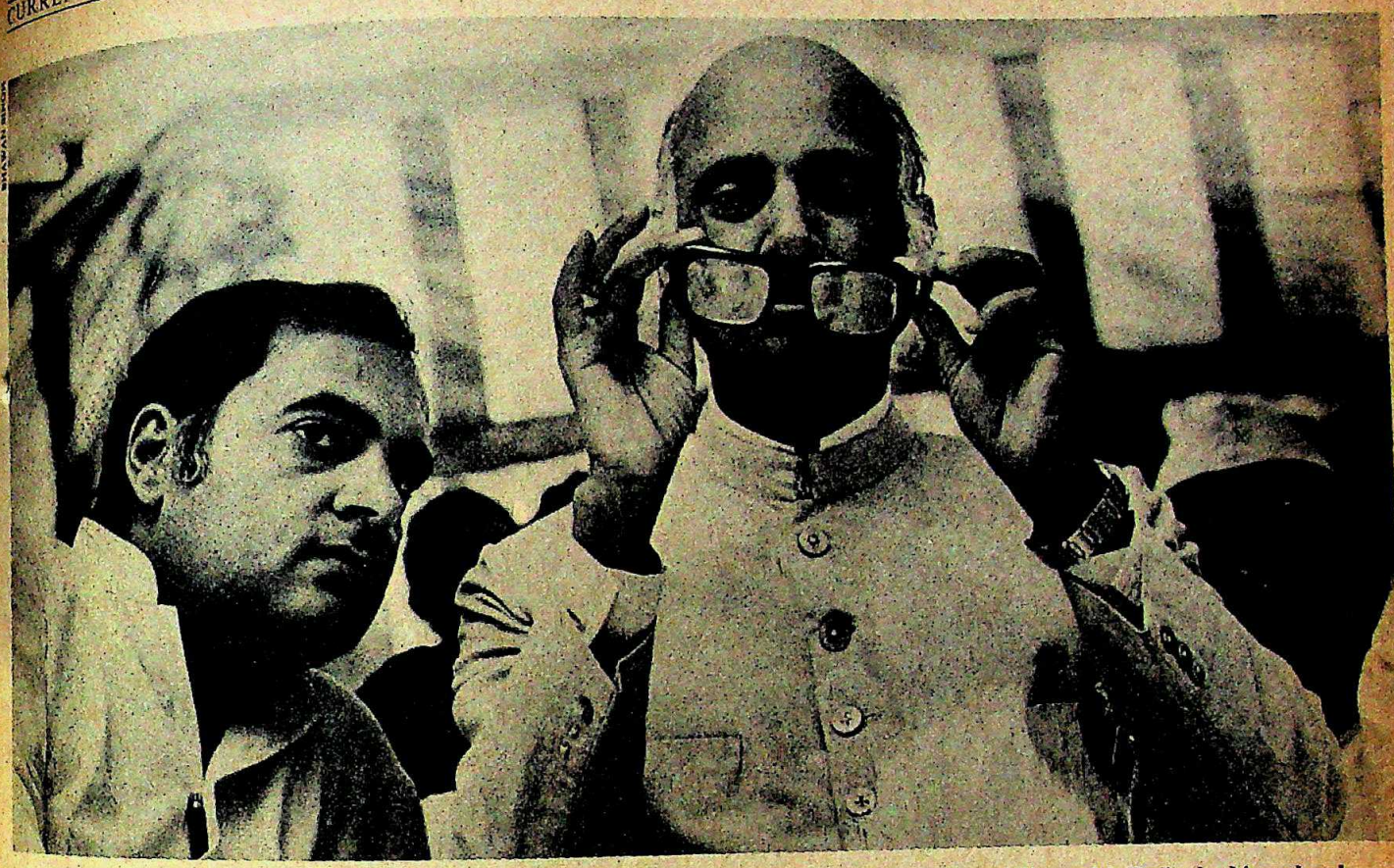
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Misra with Rajiv: looking ahead

UTTAR PRADESH

The Sripat Shuffle



FOR A leader who has been anything but forceful, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Sripat Misra's cabinet expansion last fortnight was something of a coup. As 19 freshly sworn-in ministers drove home in 19 brand-new white Ambassador cars, it appeared that Misra had won the first round of his battle for survival. Said the beaming chief minister, just before his new colleagues in the ministry took the oath of office: "I never had problems with the expansion of the Cabinet. Only, I had not given enough thought to this question because I had never felt the need for expanding my Cabinet."

That is the classic understatement. In the last 18 months Misra is estimated to have asked the Congress(I) high command 50 times, directly and through intermediaries, to allow him to expand his Cabinet. The requests turned into frenetic hard-sell in the past four weeks, when the chief minister visited Delhi six times and spent a total of 20 hours with Mrs Gandhi, Rajiv and other party chieftains. He must have been goaded by the fact that his own position was rather tenuous. At one stage, it was touch and go following adverse reports from state party workers and Governor C.P.N. Singh.

Interestingly, the announcement of the expansion finally came not from the chief minister but from Rajiv Gandhi. Caste arithmetic has clearly won the day. The charge against the earlier 25-member ministry was that it was dominated by Brahmins—six—and Thakurs—six—the two major castes in the state. Following the cabinet expansion. Harijans have received a sizeable boost, their number going up from four to nine, and women now number six against the two earlier. Both sections of society are major vote banks for the ruling party and the general elections now looming on the horizon—Uttar Pradesh has an election-winning bank of 85 seats in the Lok Sabha—must have prompted the decision.

But no chief minister can afford to antagonise the two ruling castes and this is made clear by the fact that the number of Brahmins has nearly doubled from six to 11 and the number of Thakurs has increased from six to nine. The rest of the team is made up of six members from backward and intermediary castes, apart from other minor groups. Significantly, there is only one new member from the community which has always tended to vote with the ruling party—the Muslims.

Whether the new pack will solve Misra's problems is open to question. Party leaders and functionaries are still trying to find out why it lost four of the six seats it contested in the recent crop of by-elections. Misra blames the defeats on "saboteurs" and has named eight, including three MLA's and two members of his own ministry—Baccha Pathak and Ranjit Singh Judeo. Far from giving in to the chief minister's demand that disciplinary action be taken against them, it sternly questioned his choice of by-election candidates: three of the four losers were Misra's personal choice, while the fourth was picked out by Union Industry Minister N.D. Tiwari. To rub salt into his wounds, Pathak and Judeo were in the capital at the same time as their leader, and were receiving assurances of support from the party leadership. Said Pathak: "I am a disciplined soldier of the party and I believe in the leadership's sense of justice. By now the leadership knows who bungled the by-elections."

Bad Choices: So while the expansion might have earned the chief minister a reprieve from the rampant dissidence in his party, it can at best be temporary. Misra's choice of new ministers is also not judicious. One of them is Surendra Pratap Singh neither an MLA nor an MLC but a former

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Union minister from Bulandshahr where the party lost an important Lok Sabha by-election. Another, formerly in the V.P. Singh ministry, has been included in the new one even though there are some cases pending against him. A Misra supporter explains these unsuitable choices by saying: "The chief minister can't do whatever he wants to do. In Congress(I) politics, we have to tolerate many people so that the problems are minimised and the situation remains under control."

Outside the steamy confines of politics, Misra faces even more problems. At end-January, half the state's 3.75 lakh school-teachers struck work indefinitely demanding the abolition of private management in schools. Then shopkeepers and wholesalers took to the streets clamouring for a reduction in sales tax, the largest segment of the state's measly revenue cake of Rs 934 crore last year—measly in comparison with the total government staff salary which works out to Rs 1,284 crore. In addition, IAS officials are discontented over the limited avenues for professional advancement.

The chief minister appears to have a knack of isolating himself from his MLA's, unlike his predecessor V.P. Singh for whom, as one MLA reminisced, "legislators were god". Misra simply turns legislators' requests—he received 14,000 in 1983, about per cent of them for officials' transfers—over to his secretary Yogendra Narayan, who usually advises actions "strictly according to rules". Misra's favourite word is *kanoon* (law or rule) and his conditioned reflex when confronted with a request is to call for his secretary or chief secretary or director-general of police, underlining his alienation from his legislators and his dependence on the bureaucracy. Lok Dal leaders call the Misra Government a "*baithi rahi sarkar*" (a do-nothing government).

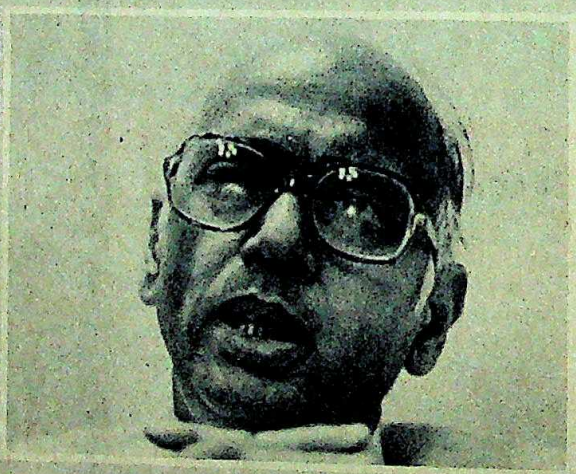
If the chief minister had the support of

SRIPAT MISRA

Stronger Hold

SRIPAT Misra, 60, always speaks in a low monotone. His detractors in the state Congress(I)—and they are legion—say his voice never rises, nor does his temper. Having been a lawyer for 20 years, he has a habit of pleading not guilty—whether it is to charges of mismanaging the state or neglecting the affairs of the party. Last fortnight, Misra, however, scored a decisive victory over his opponents when he was allowed to expand his 18-month-old cabinet. Although he played a minor role in the formation of his early cabinet and the induction of the new members it was clear that the high command had decided to give him more time to prove himself. Misra spoke to INDIA TODAY.

HARI OM GULATI



Sripat Misra: "I'll claim nothing as my achievement"

Q. *Let us begin with the last round of by-elections. Are you happy with the results in Uttar Pradesh?*

A. The results could have been better. But they are not all that bad either. The Congress has improved its position. Of the six seats , as many as three —the Bulandshahr Lok Sabha seat and the assembly seats of Siswa and Madhogarh—had been with the Opposition. Another seat, Pilibhit, had been with the Opposition since 1974; it was only in 1980 that it went to the Congress.

Q. *Do you think the organisation of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh is sound enough to face the elections?*

A. The Congress is the only party in Uttar Pradesh which has any organisation. No other party has any organisation. Of course there is scope for improvement in the organisation of the Congress, and we are taking steps for that. By the time the elections are announced, things will be perfectly all right. That is my sincere hope.

Q. *You visit Delhi quite frequently.*

A. Look here, I am a disciplined partyman. The president of my party lives in New Delhi. All the offices of the party are in New Delhi. Naturally I have to come often to keep in touch with policy changes, priorities, and national decisions.

Q. *The seat that you occupy today had earlier been occupied by men like G.B. Pant and C.B. Gupta. Do you think they consulted the prime minister so often?*

A. Let me pose a counter-question. During the freedom movement we used to get our ideas and inspiration from some of the great newspapers of the day. Are newspapers the same now ? If newspapers can be devalued, how do you expect politicians to remain the same?

Q. *That's a different debate. Anyway, there are allegations that the Muslims are unhappy with your government.*

A. There have been fewer Hindu-Muslim clashes. The record of the state Government is absolutely clean in this respect. The riots in Meerut were controlled within four days. Last year, the Muharram and the Dussehra fell on the same day. In certain places like Allahabad, the two processions had to pass along the same route. But nothing untoward happened, and everything passed off peacefully. Prompt action was taken in all cases.

Q. *There were communal clashes at Bahraich and Tanda recently.*

A. But action was taken in every case. You can enquire from the local people that even the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) played a positive role in Tanda and Bahraich. For the first time, the people had no complaints against the PAC.

Q. *When you face the elections, what will you claim as your most significant achievement?*

A. I'll claim nothing as my achievement. But if you are referring to the achievements of the Congress Government as a whole, there are many to talk about. We can claim that we have provided a stable government, secular and development-oriented. In spite of the fire at Obra we have given enough electricity to farms and factories. Of the individual points of the 20-point programme, we have been adjudged to perform very well in as many as 11, good in five and not so good in three. More and more industrialists are expressing their willingness to invest in Uttar Pradesh. There has been a record rise in agricultural productivity, the yield per hectare for wheat has gone up from 16 quintals when we took over to 20 quintals now. Aren't these enough?

Q. *Still there is endless talk of the likelihood of your being replaced soon.*

A. These talks are indulged in by people who have nothing to say. I simply ignore these talks.

Q. *Do you think you will remain chief minister till the end of the term?*

A. There is no doubt about it.

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his colleagues he could have pulled through. But the simple and unsettling fact is that he doesn't. The chief minister distrusts Health Minister Lokpati Tripathi, a fellow Brahmin, because of his closeness to the high command—he is Congress(I) Working President Kamlapati Tripathi's son—and his popularity with the 80-odd Brahmin MLA's. The Thakurs feel alienated after V.P. Singh resigned as chief minister to become Union commerce minister. Veer Bahadur Singh, the most important Thakur in the Cabinet, gives Misra a wide berth and frequently takes his orders directly from Delhi.

The Harijans and Muslims are also not cheering. The state's most influential Harijan leader, Dharam Vir, a former UPCC(I) president and now a Union minister of state, makes no secret of his dislike for Misra's leadership. He was recently consulted by Mrs Gandhi and Rajiv on state affairs. As for the Muslims, last fortnight 20-odd Muslim MLA's met in Lucknow to adopt a resolution against "the state Government's inability to inspire confidence in the minds of the minorities". Said Meerut MLA Manzoor Ahmed: "Sripat Misra's Government is secular only in name. It is hiding the misdeeds of communal officials who were responsible for the riots at Meerut, Moradabad, Bahraich and Tanda."

In that context, the expansion exercise might not have much effect on the political and administrative problems that Misra is beset with. The task before him is colossal: he has the responsibility of securing a sizeable portion of the key state's parliamentary seats for his party in the poll. So far, he has given no sign that he can provide the dynamic administration and firm leadership which would go a long way towards achieving that aim. Clearly, the chief minister will have to do much more than present colleagues with spanking new cars if the Congress(I) is to emerge unbowed from the hustings.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

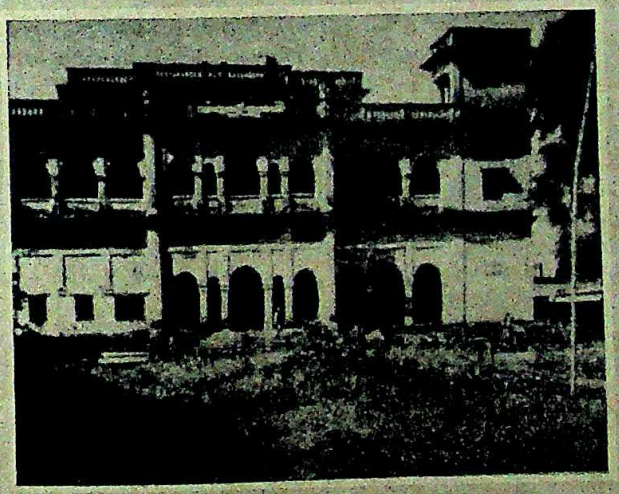
LUCKNOW

Land Bonanza

FEW HOUSES in Lucknow's Butlerganj locality have attracted as much public attention as the one owned by the three sons of Chief Minister Sripat Misra. Ever since construction began in September 1982, on the 11,000 sq ft grounds of a spacious bungalow, it has been the centre of a storm. While Misra stoutly denies any wrongdoing, his detractors allege that officials of the Lucknow Development Authority (LDA) were forced to approve both the sale deed and the buildings plans which had been rejected by previous governments. Says Mohan Singh, Lok Dal chief whip in the Assembly: "How come state officials approved the construction of a house on a plot which was meant for a government agency and whose ownership was not regularised."

According to the sale deed the Misras bought the land in November 1977 for Rs 44,800 but it was not transferred to their names despite repeated requests because they wanted to parcel it among themselves. The authorities objected on the plea that the plot could have only one house according to the terms and conditions of the original lease deed. In addition, the Urban Land Department turned down similar requests because the bigger plots had changed hands on the basis of a power of attorney. Only people who actually hold valid ownership deeds approved by the state Government can transfer their land.

The original lessee of the plot was a man named Syed Abujgar who was given a 90 year lease in 1917. After his death, his son Syed Mehdi before migrating to Pakistan gave the ownership rights to over a few dozen people including a certain Shakuntala Devi Sood who is now settled in England. But while the ownership was transferred by the individuals the plot automatically became nuzul land and its ownership vested in the Custodian of Emigration Property. The huge bungalow built by Mehdi became the office of the Khadi Gramodyog.



RAVIVAR

The disputed plot in Butlerganj: setting a precedent

In 1967, however, the new owners including Sood's representatives asked the Government to regularise the transfers but their plea was rejected and the ownership of the property stayed in the name of the original allottee. Ten years later in 1977 Misra along with two friends, Virendra Pratap Singh and Mahendra Prashad Singh bought the land from Bhagwan Singh, who was acting on behalf of Shakuntala Devi Sood. The transfer of the land blocked for almost five years, eventually materialised on August 2, 1982—two weeks after Misra became chief minister, and plans for subdividing the land were approved. Misra, however, denies that there was anything irregular in the deal. He says: "Let there be an impartial probe into the whole matter. I am not after making money. I bought the land when I was not in power."

Officials Shifted: Once Misra was in office things moved in his favour. Officials who stood in the way of regularising the plans were shifted immediately. One such was A.P. Singh, the then vice chairman of the LDA who demanded the copy of the original lease which was not in the LDA's records. Misra's plans were approved on July 20, 1983 but Singh was still transferred three weeks later. Others who obliged the chief minister were luckier. Nuzul officer Ram Sewak Misra who regularised the sale of the plot was promoted in spite of vigilance cases pertaining to illegal lease transfers. In fact, A.P. Singh had earlier tried to have Ram Sewak Misra transferred. But after Singh's transfer the LDA authorities also refunded the development charges which they had earlier collected from the Misras.

Misra's house would not have been the centre of such attention if it had not been for the fact that there are others waiting in the sidelines for the chance to pull the same trick. Over 500 big plot owners have been fighting to have the building by-laws which permit only one house on each plot relaxed. Over a dozen leading builders have already signed contracts to convert plots into multi-dwelling units.

Misra's case has set a precedent in the locality and the LDA has had to clear scores of other similar applicants. Once the rules were relaxed the price of land zoomed by over 200 per cent from Rs 600 to Rs 1,000 per sq m for an approved plan. Experts say the value of various pieces of real estate which now have been allowed to raise more than one house have increased by Rs 10 crore. That means that Misra's sons, among others are richer men.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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JANATA PARTY

Shaken by Strife

ORGANISATIONAL elections are usually held to strengthen a political party. But this axiom is evidently not applicable to the Janata Party. As the countdown for the election of party president due on March 4 began last fortnight, the infighting within the party came dramatically to the fore. Predictably, the first salvo against the party chief Chandra Shekhar who is seeking a new two-year term was fired by the irrepressible Subramaniam Swamy, MP, who announced his own candidature for the post. Claiming that Chandra Shekhar had ignored the party's organisation during his seven-year tenure, Swamy said: "It is in the broader interest of the party that we should have a new person at a time when the Opposition is going to fight a decisive battle against the Congress(I)." Chandra Shekhar meanwhile, chose to maintain a dignified silence at the outbursts. Said he: "Since I am a candidate, I will not comment on the election."

Though the Janata Party has been plagued with internal dissensions in each state since 1980 when it was ousted from power, the recent spurt in dissident activity is directly linked with the organisational elections. Next month, over 1,100 members of the party National Council, which is elected by over 5,000 state council members, will in turn choose their national president by secret ballot. The elections—which are normally held after every two years—are being held this time after a lapse of three years. Chandra Shekhar was elected unanimously in February 1981 for a two-year term but elections could not be held as scheduled in 1983 because of "organisational problems".

Controversial Move: It was the postponement of the elections which triggered off the squabbles within the party. Alleged Swamy: "Elections have arbitrarily been postponed by the party's secretariat without assigning any reasons. Many leaders from various states have written to the party bosses protesting against it." Swamy and his supporters allege that the party leaders put off the polls because they wanted to interfere with the working of the electoral college in each state in order to ensure that Chandra Shekhar would not face any stiff opposition. The incumbent party chief's critics cite many electoral malpractices to support their points. For example, on February 4 the Uttar Pradesh party state council adopted a resolution authorising Chandra Shekhar to nominate 85 representatives to the National Council from the state.

Swamy and three other prominent leaders including a district president later challenged the resolution on the plea that it was adopted by show of hands, and not by a secret ballot as provided for in the party constitution. Since Manager Singh, who is from Ballia, Chandra Shekhar's home district, was appointed returning officer, the fairness of the meeting was also challenged. Swamy wrote to Bapu Kaldate, convenor of the three-member election committee of the party, to say: "If Chandra Shekhar indeed does contest the national presidentship again, the resolution then empowers a candidate to nominate his voters.".

Uttar Pradesh is not the only state where the fairness of the elections has been questioned by dissidents. Ever since the election for the district and state-level committees began in November, there is hardly a state in which warring factions have not accused each other of rigging. Some examples:

► in Ahmedabad early this month, supporters of former prime minister Morarji Desai led by Dinesh Shah, former finance minister, staged a walk-out from the state council meeting. They alleged that the state Janata party chief Indubhai Patel was not elected for the full term but was given only a temporary extension and should resign. Earlier over 150 active workers from Baroda wrote to Kaldate alleging that the elections to the district office-bearers were rigged;

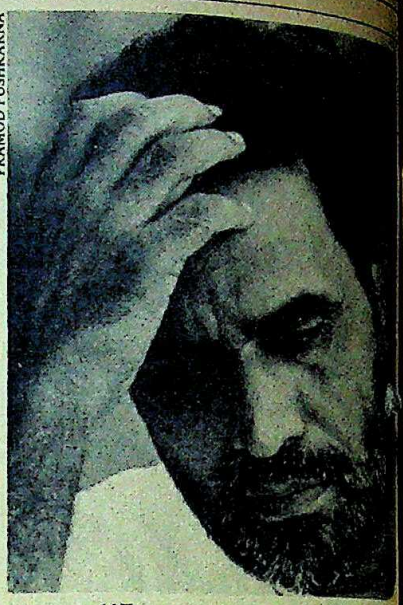
► in New Delhi this month a crowd of over 500 Janata workers assembled to demand the ouster of state party President Kishore Lal and holding of fresh elections;

► in Bihar late last month, former chief minister Karpoori Thakur boycotted the state's council meeting alleging that the elections were not properly conducted by the state party chief Satyendra Narain Singh. Thakur's supporters alleged that Singh wanted to nominate his own cronies to the National Council;

► in Orissa, wordy duels were exchanged between anti- and pro-Biju Patnaik supporters over the elections of various district-level office-bearers. The faction led by Rabi Ray, a former Union minister, accused Patnaik of packing the district with his own nominees and denying Ray's supporters even membership forms;

► in Tamil Nadu, the party split vertically when Kumari Anandan walked out of the party with three of five Janata MLA's to revive his old Gandhi-Kamraj National Congress (GKNC). He had merged his GKNC with the Janata on October 19 at a function presided over by Chandra Shekhar himself but has now left the party alleging large-scale irregularities in the elections;

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



"I assure you that the party is not going to break due to minor aberrations."
—Chandra Shekhar

► in Madhya Pradesh, Raghu Thakur, a former socialist and protégé of former Union minister Purushottam Kaushik, led a delegation to the central leadership to complain about malpractices allegedly indulged in by the supporters of newly-elected party President Brij Lal Verma, a former Jana Sanghite.

Differences: Despite all these allegations the central leadership of the party is confident it can handle the situation. Says Chandra Shekhar: "There are some problems in a few states but I have solved most of them in the past. There is no reason why we can't solve them now. I assure you that the party is not going to break due to minor aberrations." Asks Kishore Lal, president of the Delhi unit of the party: "Which other party does not have these problems? If we have to work democratically, differences do arise."

Such confidence notwithstanding, in each state, the party is divided between the veterans and the newcomers, and between the socialists and the erstwhile Congress(O) factions. In Bihar, Satyendra Narain Singh, the powerful Rajput leader was against giving any undue importance to those who had deserted the party in 1979. On the other hand, Karpoori Thakur demanded equal representation in the party on the plea that he was also a Janata leader in his own right. In Tamil Nadu, the state unit split on the very question of the original and new Janata members, comparing the Janata Party to a 'house of wax'. Complained Anandan after his resignation from the party: "None of the

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"Chandra Shekhar is an anti-organisation man. He encourages factionalism because he is indecisive."
—Subramaniam Swamy

promises made by Chandra Shekhar was kept. We were treated like second-class citizens in the party. We could not suffer indignities and humiliations any more."

While the organisational elections will take their own course, they will definitely have a bearing on the party's future politics. Although Swamy is not expected to pose a major threat to Chandra Shekhar he may, if he is able to rally around him a sizeable chunk of National Council members, force Chandra Shekhar to review not only his association with the left-dominated United Front, but also concede certain organisational posts to the pro-Desai forces in the party. The party chief has already climbed down from his earlier position of having no alliance with the National Democratic Alliance. Said Chandra Shekhar: "The Janata is ready for a merger of the Opposition, an electoral adjustment among them of a United Front to be composed of them. But any such agreement has to be based on a common agreed programme." But Swamy and his supporters would like the Janata to sever its links with the leftists.

Meanwhile, a section of the central leadership has initiated a move to get Chandra Shekhar unanimously re-elected. In order to keep Swamy in check, a few have demanded disciplinary action against him for his anti-party activities. Says Swamy: "I am going to fight it out and win. The Janata Party leaders, it seems, are busy in checkmating each other rather than plotting against their enemy—the Congress(I)."

—PRABHU CHAWLA

SUBRAMANIAM SWAMY

"I have tremendous support"

FIREBRAND Janata leader Subramaniam Swamy spoke to INDIA TODAY *last fortnight about his plans for the party. Excerpts:*

Q. *You are spearheading a move to replace Chandra Shekhar. Why?*

A. Janata Party elections were due in February 1983 but were not held in time according to the party's constitution. Later on, our national executive decided to hold organisational elections including that of the national president by November 1983 so that the new president could strengthen the party for the Lok Sabha elections. But by arbitrary orders, the party secretariat has been postponing elections for no rhyme or reason.

Q. *But what are the reasons for a continuous battle against the president?*

A. It is not a personal question. People are trying to fiddle with the elections. For example I have objected to Uttar Pradesh State Council's majority decision to authorise Mr Chandra Shekhar to nominate national council members. It is unheard of in democracy that a candidate is given power to nominate 15 per cent of the electoral college.

Q. *Do you believe that Uttar Pradesh delegates would have supported you?*

A. I have tremendous support in Uttar Pradesh and other states as well. Before I decided to contest elections I toured Uttar Pradesh extensively. During my tours I got the impression that Mr Chandra Shekhar is promoting his own Thakur caste and annoying other castes. Ram Dhan, our former leader, has made it clear by his resignation that in Uttar Pradesh a large number of criminals have entered our party.

Q. *If the state units want Chandra Shekhar to nominate national representatives what is wrong?*

A. It is totally undemocratic. It is not good for the president himself to win a temporary battle and lose a war. He has been giving speeches that he is not after power but is interested in solving people's problems. But his recent actions within the party have harmed him and not me.

Q. *But Chandra Shekhar is being projected as a prime ministerial candidate?*

A. The prime minister is elected by the majority party in the Lok Sabha. I am sure the Janata Party is not going to repeat its 1980 mistake of projecting one individual as its leader. During 1980, we fielded Babu Jagjivan as our future prime minister and what happened? Let the elections be held. You can't count your chickens before they are hatched. Moreover, clear-cut commitments of making Mr Chandra Shekhar prime minister have come not from within the Janata but from outside the party.

Q. *What has been Chandra Shekhar's contribution to the growth of the party?*

A. I think to the extent Mr Chandra Shekhar's personal image has gone up due to the padyatra, the party has also gained because he is in the Janata Party. But Chandra Shekhar is an anti-organisation man. He encourages factionalism because he is indecisive. Now if he continues as president, the law of diminishing returns will set in.

Q. *On what basis do you think that you will be able to serve the party better?*

A. I believe that I will be able to consolidate the national democratic forces better than Mr Chandra Shekhar can, largely because of my clear identification against the communists. I also have a better relationship with Morarji Desai and Chaudhary Charan Singh. I sincerely believe that unless these two leaders come together it is not possible to counter the Soviet-inspired Left Front in the country.

Q. *Are you opposed to the Janata Party leading the United Front?*

A. The question of the United Front has never been discussed and approved by the national executive of the party. I will support its continuation only if it declares genuine non-alignment of keeping equidistance from both the superpowers, its foreign policy and commits itself to the mixed economy. I am opposed to any electoral adjustments with the communists.

Q. *Do you think that as president you will be able to make the party stronger?*

A. During the last few years, the party organisation has been neglected at all levels. There has been a complete neglect of party finances, front organisations and district level committees. I will concentrate on the organisation. Maybe because of my Jan Sangh background, I will do better. If I become the president, half the BJP will join the Janata.

Q. *But you seem a loner and may withdraw from the contest at the last moment.*

A. I am in the field now and there is no question of withdrawal. What can my detractors say against me? They can't say that Swamy is corrupt, Swamy is a womaniser, Swamy encourages casteism and gangsterism and so forth. Demand for my programmes is not less than that for Mr Chandra Shekhar. Whether I am a loner or not will be clear during the elections.

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KARNATAKA

Reaping the Whirlwind



THE CONGRESS(I) is not the only one gunning for Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde. Last fortnight, a section of the state's farmers, belonging to the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha rounded off their eight-day agitation with a strident call: "Hegde *chale jao* (go away)." Their 'rail roko' and 'rasta roko' agitation, which began on January 26 was unprecedented: 30,000 of its members courted arrest, with 8,000 being released soon after their arrest and the other 22,000 taken into judicial custody.

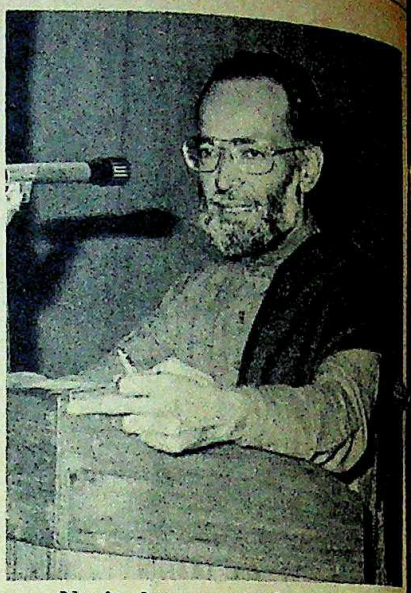
The agitation threw the state's transport lines out of gear—trains ran late as farmers squatted on the tracks, and the Bangalore-Mysore section was totally paralysed for a while, causing great inconvenience to passengers. In Rayapur, some arrested farmers broke out of their improvised jail to block the road traffic protesting against bad treatment in the jail. Elsewhere two buses and one jeep were set on fire, and a busfull of Rajasthani tourists was robbed by a mob of 200 armed with sticks. The Sangha promptly denied that its members had anything to do with the incidents. Said a leader: "The symbolic road and rail blockade was to draw the attention of the non-agrarian population towards the problems of the farmers and the apathy of the Government towards us."

The Sangha claims its main grouse is that Hegde has reneged on his promises to the farmers. Said Professor M.D. Nanjundaswami, a Bangalore Law College teacher and convenor of the Sangha: "Hegde had assured us some significant benefits would emerge. But after the thoroughly disappointing budget (for 1983-84) he had the temerity to say that the budget was almost finalised by the previous government." But the Government has announced often enough that its total package of benefits for the farmers exceeded Rs 70 crore. Concessions announced in the budget amounted to Rs 36 crore, with additional concessions being announced later.

Concessions: For instance, it announced that loans worth Rs 7.06 crore including *takkavi* (small loans for the purchase of sheep, poultry pigs, and the like), flood relief and fodder loans would be given. Farmers with new irrigation facilities have been exempted from water rates for five years. Financial aid for the purchase of agricultural implements, and a 50 per cent subsidy on the cost of pesticides and insecticides are also part of the deal. Agricultural implements and household goods are off the confiscation list in case of defaulted loan payments. All this is in addition to the financial assistance offered to farmers. Finally, criminal cases filed during the farmers' agitations from 1980 have been withdrawn.

The Sangha, on the other hand, maintains that the abolition of betterment levy by the Gundu Rao government is the only tangible relief given to the farmers. But the Sangha is really waiting to see what Hegde's second budget will have for them. The next phase of the agitation is scheduled for March 15, but a crucial meeting on March 2 will decide what kind of turn the agitation will take. Said Nanjundaswamy: "Farmers represent 75.5 per cent of Karnataka's population. Only a 75.5 per cent rural component in the budget will be acceptable to us —this gross pampering of the urban mass must stop."

Meanwhile, the Sangha has been getting aggressive in its battle with Hegde. It called upon the chief minister to seek a vote of confidence in Kanakapura from where he was elected last year in a crucial by-election. The Sangha says confidently that he will lose by a margin of 30,000 votes, twice the lead he had over his nearest rival. Hegde has ignored the challenge.

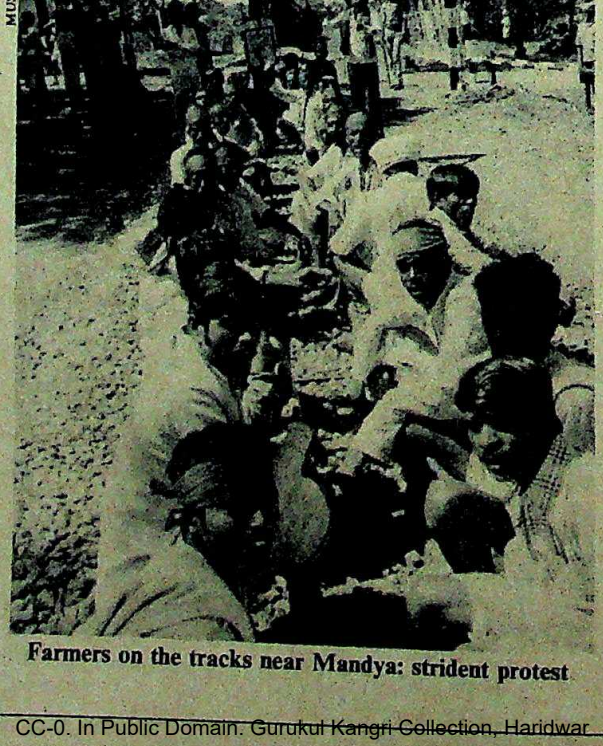


Nanjundaswamy: anti-urban stand

Political Strategy: The present exercise by the Sangha has been read as not only a means of making its presence felt before the budget but also as a not-so-transparent move to create some sort of a political base for itself. Says Nanjundaswamy: "We plan to train through camps a cadre of non-party individuals to become legislators. If the present attitude of the Government continues, it will not last even until the end of the year."

What dilutes the chances of a reconciliation is that the agitationists have insisted that their charter of demands be conceded as a precondition to any dialogue with the Government. The Sangha has, among other things, called for a ban on caning and firing on farmer satyagrahis; the regularisation of land encroached upon by landless labourers without penalty; removal of restrictions on the free movement of foodgrains throughout the country; the appointment of a price commission to determine the cost of cultivation of agricultural produce and the enactment of price fixation laws; the abolition of the Fragmentation Act; and abolition of the practice of summons and arrest without warrants. But Hegde points out that some of these, at least, are simply not within the purview of the state Government.

The Sangha is unconvinced, however, that the Government is making any sincere attempts to solve the problem. Says Nanjundaswamy cuttingly: "There is no difference between the previous government and this one



MUSHTAQ AHMED

Farmers on the tracks near Mandya: strident protest

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except in the style of speech. This Janata Government which has come to power on the negative vote of the farmers believes in just drifting for a period of five years." For its part, the Sangha hasn't been helping with its insistence on preconditions and that all its 120 office-bearers should be present at important meetings.

Hegde, pointing out that several telegrams to the Sangha inviting them to meetings had gone unheeded, asks: "How can anyone carry on a meeting with so many?" He claims that other meetings had been stalled by the Sangha which backed out objecting to the presence of other farmer organisations, and on one occasion, the presence of bureaucrats. Argued Nanjundaswamy: "There is nothing flimsy about our reasons. It is by insisting on talking to a few office-bearers that these people break up organisations. We insist that every office-bearer is present at important meetings. Likewise, why should a meeting between us, the masters, be attended by the paid government servants (bureaucrats)? Their duty is to implement our decisions."

Support Base: The Sangha leaders strongly suspect that Hegde had a hand in splitting their organisation. When the January 5 by-elections were announced, one section of the Sangha led by its then vice-president Revanasiddaiah broke away to form the Farm Labourers Association, on the question of farmers participating actively in politics. The Sangha claims that the rebel group has no significant following. It claims that it has the support of 20,000 villages out of the total 26,826 in the state, and an active membership of at least one crore. But there are other associations of farmers in the state, as well the Pranti Raitha Sangha of the CPI(M), the Bharatiya Raitha Sangha of the Bharatiya Janata Party, and the kisan cell of the Congress(I). Farmers of all political hues in the Malaprabha river basin area are represented by the Malaprabha Samanvaya Samiti.

Curiously, the cotton growers of Karnataka, now caught in a real financial crisis due to late harvests and the prospect of selling their produce at much below the normal rates, have kept out of any agitation. In fact, they are pinning their hopes on Hegde who has offered credit facilities till the prices of cotton recover by March or April—he has also offered them storage facilities. The faith they have in him to some extent gives Hegde's pro-farmer image a much-needed boost.

But he will need much more than that to meet the Sangha's challenge, particularly if, as it has indicated, it decides to take on the beleaguered Janata Government solidly on the political platform.

—K. BHANUMATHI

ASSAM

Simmering



IN ASSAM, the starting point is always Mangaldai, 65 km from Gauhati across the Brahmaputra. The anti-foreigner agitation began here in 1979. So did election violence in February 1983. Last fortnight, there were again ominous signs from Mangaldai in the wake of reports that at least nine immigrant Muslims had been killed in the char areas under the Sipajhar police station. The nine feared killed were among a group of 20 who were coming to the area from Simalutola, an immigrant-dominated village in the Goalpara district along the border with Bangladesh. They were overpowered by a large horde, presumably Assamese, trussed and taken away in a swift operation, witnessed by some immigrant farmers hiding nearby.

For nearly a week the police thought it was a case of kidnapping. But later in the fortnight they commissioned boats to go round scouring the Brahmaputra, looking for bodies. Said a senior police officer in Gauhati: "Our initial feeling was this could be an isolated case of crime. But the region is much too close to Chawlkhowa Chapori for us to be complacent." Chawlkhowa Chapori is a large char salient where over 500 immigrant Muslims had been slain in well-organised attacks in the 1983 election.

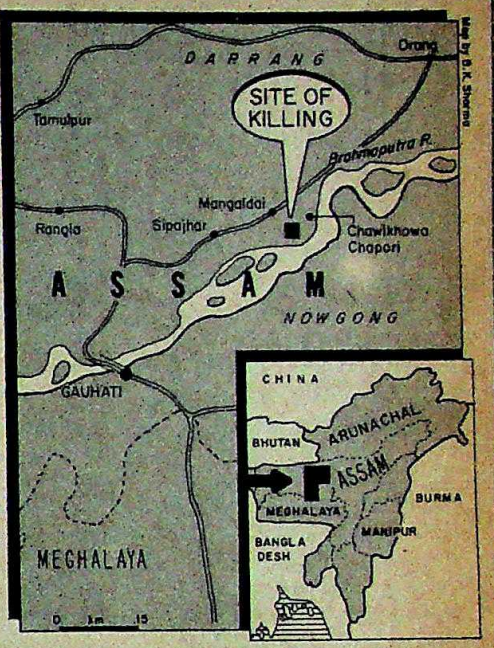


"To tame a wild elephant you have to ride an elephant"

—Prafulla Mahanta
AASU President



Mrs Gandhi with Saikia: quest for legitimacy



Intelligence sources and officials in Dispur say it is still a little premature to read in this incident a recrudescence of the nascent ethno-communal violence. From the extremists' point of view, however, this is just the right time to strike, with the Government poised to make at least a small breakthrough on the foreigners tribunals and the moderate All Assam Students Union (AASU) leadership in the process of working out the modalities for launching a regional party of their own.

Continuing Agitation: The AASU leaders' preoccupation with the political spadework has kept the agitation in low key while the extremist elements have been demanding action. It is also in this perspective that the security agencies view the unsuccessful sniping on a passenger bus during the 36-hour Assam bandh while Mrs Gandhi was in the state last fortnight. Stray bomb blasts and sabotage on rail tracks confirm the fact that despite the Government's repeated claims of arms capture, arrests and surrender of extremists, the latter were still active all over the Brahmaputra valley.

So were the moderates—in a different manner. After announcing their decision to form a political party at a large meeting at Jorhat last month, the AASU leaders had continued a desperate bid to unite disparate political groups. Their effort is to put up a united Assamese front against the Congress(I) and left parties, both identified with the pro-Bengali or pro-immigrant interests.

Consequently the agitation leaders are trying to first bring together the leaders of Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad (PLP) and Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal (AJD), small regional parties and constituents of the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP). In the past, the leaders of the two parties have often fought with each other bitterly and contributed to much

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of the acrimony within the AAGSP. But AASU leaders, who still control the agitation, say they will get over these problems because they must turn political now. Said AASU President Prafulla Kumar Mahanta: "To tame a wild elephant you have to ride an elephant," implying that a political problem could only be solved through political means.

Shrewd Moves: In Dispur, Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia too was trying to sort the problem through means political, with a generous bit of populism thrown in. Last fortnight, Mrs Gandhi made her sixth visit to the state in less than a year and laid the foundation-stone for Pragjyotishpur, the new capital for a state which has been functioning out of a tea warehouse in Dispur for nearly a decade since it lost its old capital of Shillong to Meghalaya. While in her speeches at Chandrapur, 25 km east of Gauhati where the new capital is being built and at Tinsukia, Mrs Gandhi firmly announced that the Government was prepared for talks, she put a rider that this could only be with the participation of the state Government. The move was yet another shrewd bargain with the agitators offering talks in return for legitimacy for Saikia. For the agitators it remained a no-go situation.

In the same quest for legitimacy, the Government finally issued the guidelines for the functioning of the foreigners' tribunals on the success of which Saikia's survival hinges. Understandably, the guidelines were announced on the eve of Mrs Gandhi's visit and contained no surprises. The tribunals will function according to the newly enacted legislation on migrants in Assam which virtually lays down 1971 as the cut-off year much to the chagrin of the agitation leaders. Even a reluctant Mrs Gandhi had to admit that the tribunals' performance had so far been unsatisfactory. During a long meeting she is believed to have instructed the Assam Cabinet to give this top priority.

Tricky Juncture: With the agitators and the Government embroiled in the political situation, the Election Commission was not far behind. Late last month, following an all-party meeting, Chief Election Commissioner R.K. Trivedi issued a rather cryptic communique announcing the commission's inclination to revise the electoral rolls in the state taking the 1971 electoral rolls as the basis. But he put the ball back in the state Government's court by saying that the commission would follow its recommendation on whether the law and order situation permitted such a venture.

For the state Government, if it says yes, the revision could mean revival of popular hysteria against foreigners on the electoral rolls. Also, the AASU will have a strong argument against the legitimacy of a government elected on the basis of the 1979 electoral rolls while now the Election Commission itself accepts these as faulty and updates them, taking 13-year-old rolls as the basis. A no, on the other hand, will be an admission of the Government's lack of confidence.

Immediate Need: Here a decision will have to be made fast because delaying cannot pay for long. The next general elections are due soon. Once again the Election Commission will face the prospect of holding elections in Assam against popular opposition. Explained a senior bureaucrat in Delhi: "No Lok Sabha poll was held in the Brahmaputra valley in 1980. In 1983, too, polling for five Lok Sabha seats remained incomplete. It will be a tremendous blow to the Government if it fails to hold elections once again."

Thus, in spite of the preoccupation with Punjab and Kashmir, decision-makers in the Union Home Ministry and Cabinet Secretariat were busy working out an approach for the future of Assam. So were the agitation leaders who will make some important decisions at another convention likely to be held at Jorhat in March. To the outcome of these is linked the future of the Saikia Government, now completing a chequered first year in office.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

THE NORTH-EAST

Rebel Rousing

THERE are sparks of a fresh fire in the jungle fastnesses of the North-eastern hill states. Last fortnight the insurgents of the Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) pulled off their biggest coup of all time, ambushing a strong BSF patrol at Puthingmanuthum, near Khantalang, the thickly-wooded junction of Tripura, Mizoram and Bangladesh, leaving five dead, including Assistant Commandant S.S. Sangwan. This followed a series of attacks in the past three weeks on state government offices and CRPF patrols, which claimed three lives.

Two days earlier, on January 30, two assassins, self styled Sergeant Ramkathing and Private Wainning of the outlawed National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) had murdered Yangmaso Shaiza, a former Manipur chief minister and leader of the Manipur People's Party (MPP). In Mizoram, intelligence agencies intercepted instructions from the underground Mizo National Front (MNF) headquarters in Bangladesh to its men to "strike really hard at the non-Mizos this time". Said an army intelligence officer: "It falls into the familiar pattern."

For a while now there has been no doubt about some amount of joint planning by the various rebel groups in the North-east. But what surprised intelligence men most of all was the sudden show of muscle by the Tripuri insurgents who had more or less been written off following the surrender of many men of the Army of Tripura People's Liberation Organisation (ATPLO) along with their leader Binanda Jamatiya. Intelligence sources now admit they had underestimated the challenge from Bejoy Hrangkhawl who has taken over charge of the insurgency after jumping bail in the case of the famous Mandai massacre.



Ramkathing: murder mission

Careful Planning: For over a month before the ambush on the BSF patrol, Hrangkhawl was reported moving from one tribal hamlet to another exhorting his supporters not to lose. He also master-minded the publicity-oriented operation in Gandacherra village on January 26 where his men distributed pro-Khalistan pamphlets. Sources in the BSF say they have identified the leaders of the ambushers as Ananda Debbarma and Tempo Tripura.

It was the first time that the Tripuri insurgents attacked a BSF patrol. Till now they had limited themselves to lesser targets, and intelligence sources say the operation was organised under the guidance of the Mizos. The Khantalang area has always been the MNF's favourite route of ingress into Mizoram from their hide-outs in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill tracts.

In fact, the intelligence sensors are now trained at Mizoram. The tiny Union territory is scheduled to go to the polls in April and that could mean opportunity for trouble-makers. The focus will as a consequence shift over to the Tripura-Mizoram axis.

The Shaiza murder, on the other hand, is considered to be a simpler affair. He was a Tangkhul Naga from Manipur's Ukhrul district and disliked by the NSCN. Besides, he was the brother-in-law of Rano Shaiza, Phizo's niece and, along with her husband Lingshum, the most important middle-ground functionary for the Naga Federal Government which has a long-time feud with the NSCN.

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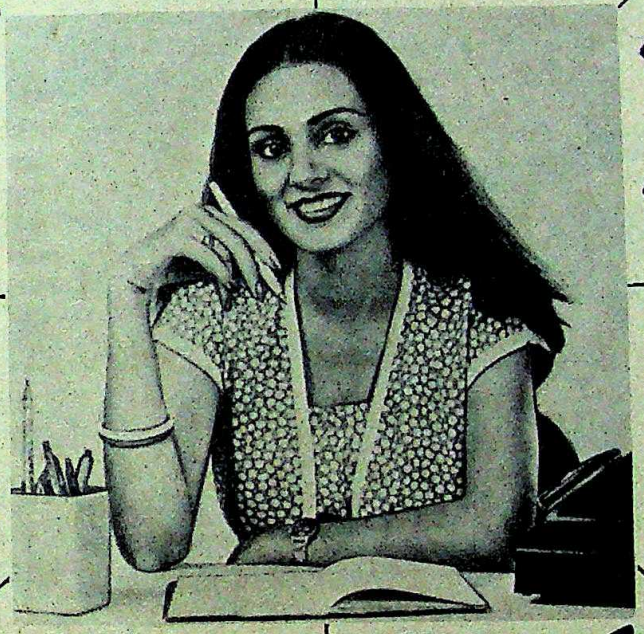
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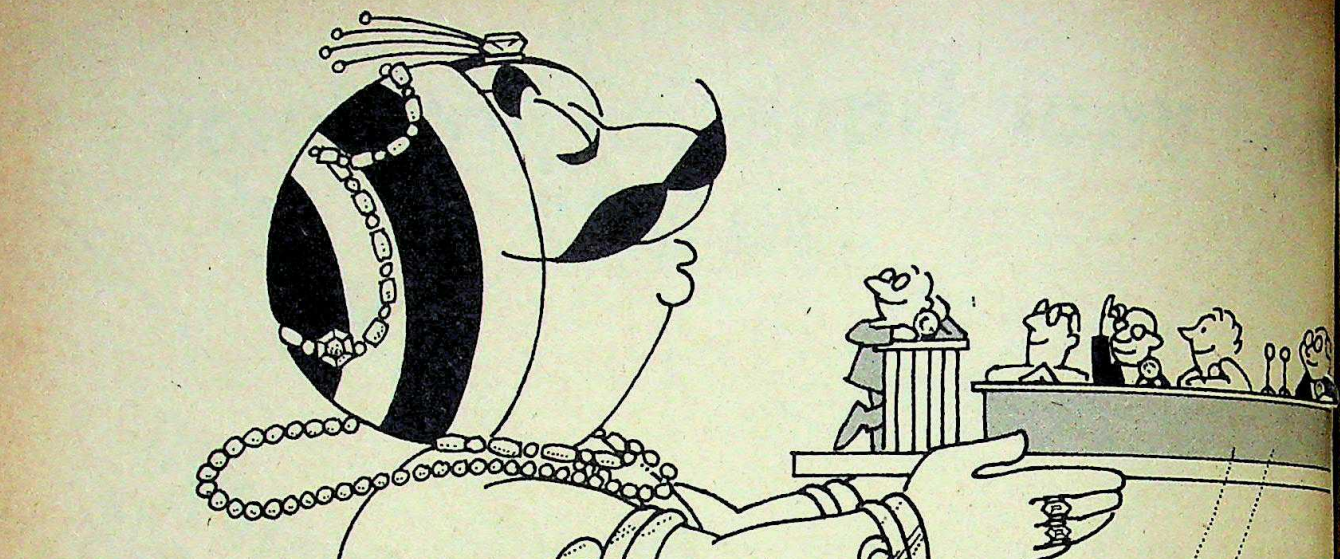
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TAMIL NADU

Playing on Words

TAMIL NADU Chief Minister M. G. Ramachandran offers the classic example of Orwellian doublespeak. Just recently, with the air of an elder statesman, MGR had taken his "younger brother" Kannada film artiste Rajkumar aside and gave him some solemn advice. Rajkumar had been fighting to make Kannada the administrative language in Karnataka at all levels and MGR had advised him that: "India is one country and anybody can seek employment anywhere. Please do not oppose the Karnataka Government's decision to provide an opportunity for its non-Kannadiga employees to learn Kannada language for their official work."

By last fortnight, however, it was obvious that MGR had quite forgotten his own sermon with his AIADMK Government poised to superimpose Tamil over every other language in the state. The stringent—and according to some, rather absurd—measures include an ordinance promulgated by the state Government on January 7, 1984 amending the Tamil Nadu Cinema (Regulation) Act, 1955, which had empowered the Government to issue directions to cinema theatres to screen Tamil films for no more than nine months in a year. The ordinance now enables the state Government to formulate stringent rules that can force every cinema in the state to screen Tamil films for at least 90 or 100 days and up to nine months in a year "in the interest" as the ordinance says, "of the general public of the state, who speak mainly Tamil".

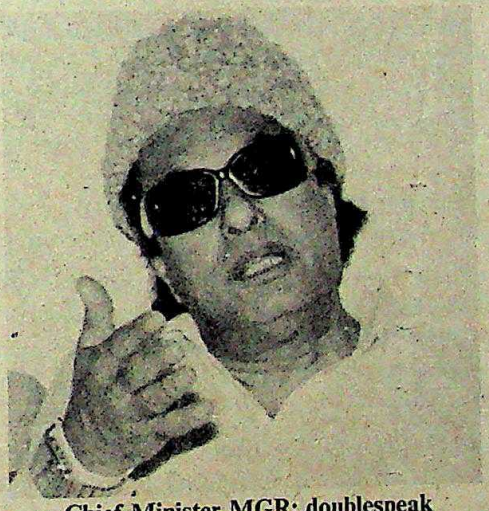
Adverse Reaction: Predictably, that move has generated a considerable storm in cinema circles. Said G. Umapathy, vice-president of the Tamil Nadu Film Exhibitors Association and the proprietor of a leading theatre: "I don't see any need for an ordinance or a rule to force theatres to screen Tamil films. None of us are against Tamil films. Only, on many occasions, we don't get prints of Tamil films in time."

Umapathy had earlier gone to court against the AIADMK's notification of 1978 stipulating compulsory screening of Tamil films for a minimum of three months in a year by cinema houses. The high court struck down the notification and maintained that such compulsory screening could be enforced only by amending the Cinema (Regulation) Act, and not by merely tinkering with the rules. Smarting under that judicial verdict, the state Government has now retaliated by changing the parent act itself. Said Umapathy: "We do not want to go to court any more on this. We have to survive with this government."

Argued Babubhai H. Shah, the leading distributor of Hindi films in the south: "This ordinance is foolish and has been issued only because the state Government felt insulted by the adverse court verdict on its earlier notification. The ordinance will also unwittingly become a political weapon in the hands of future state governments." Moreover, out of the about 2,000 theatres of Tamil Nadu, only about 20 show Hindi or English films. Does this 1 per cent encouragement that other language films receive, Shah asks, deserve such a drastic ordinance?

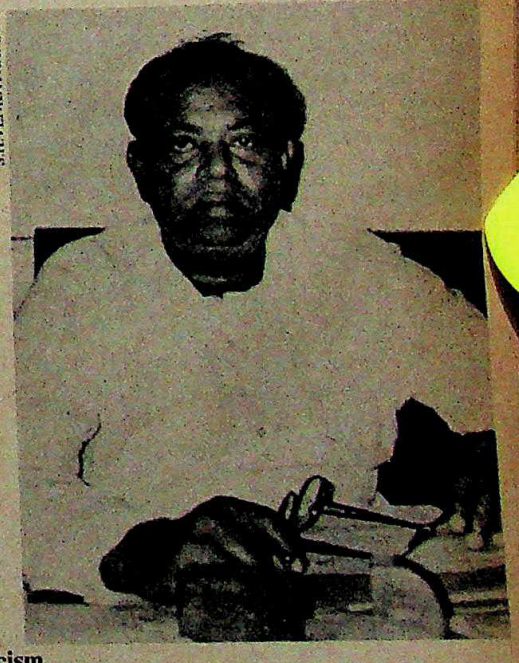
Chauvinist Moves: At the same time there are some who are quite pleased with MGR's new move. Said Valampuri Somanathan, president of the Tamil Film Producers Association: "If the 1,900-odd cinema theatres in the state which show Tamil films 365 days in a year can get an adequate number of Tamil films for screening, why cannot the remaining 20 also get films in our native language to exhibit?" D. Ramanujam, former president of the South Indian Film Chamber takes his argument a little further. Says he: "As far as I can see, the state Government's only interest is that Tamil pictures should be screened in good theatres that are not now available for Tamil films."

That was not all MGR gave his people to think about last fortnight. In another



Chief Minister MGR: doublespeak





S.H.VENKATRAMANI

Babubhai Shah (left) and Umapathy: strong criticism

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amendment to the Tamil Nadu Shop and Establishment Rules, 1948, the AIADMK Government made it obligatory for shopowners to exhibit the name of their shop predominantly in Tamil. Said an irate professor of management: "It is a rather silly order. In marketing, name boards are not only imitation, but are also considered a part of advertising. And suppose there is a shop selling only English books, will it not be ridiculous for the shop to have a prominently Tamil name board?"

Political Gimmickry: Said J. Prasad Tavids, secretary of the Southern India Chamber of Commerce and Industry: "It would have been fair if English could be given equal prominence on a name board. We feel it is a political measure. The consequent inspection by labour inspectors will be another source of irritation."

MGR made yet another announcement in a fortnight of surprises. At a public meeting, he said that grants and pensions would be given to the participants of the anti-Hindi agitation in Tamil Nadu in 1965. Obviously a calculated move to win popular support, MGR even went to the extent of characterising the agitation as a "historic movement". But, for the rest of the country, it came as a shock to see a state government—for the first time—rewarding those who took part in an agitation against an Indian language, and that too the national language.

As far as strategies go, Murasoli Maran, DMK MP is convinced that this one will not work. Said he: "All these actions of MGR are political gimmicks, and will not detract the attention of the people from the Government's failure on the crucial economic front." But then, considering the dark-spectacled, inscrutable chief minister of Tamil Nadu's cinematic background, gimmicks are what bring in the crowds.

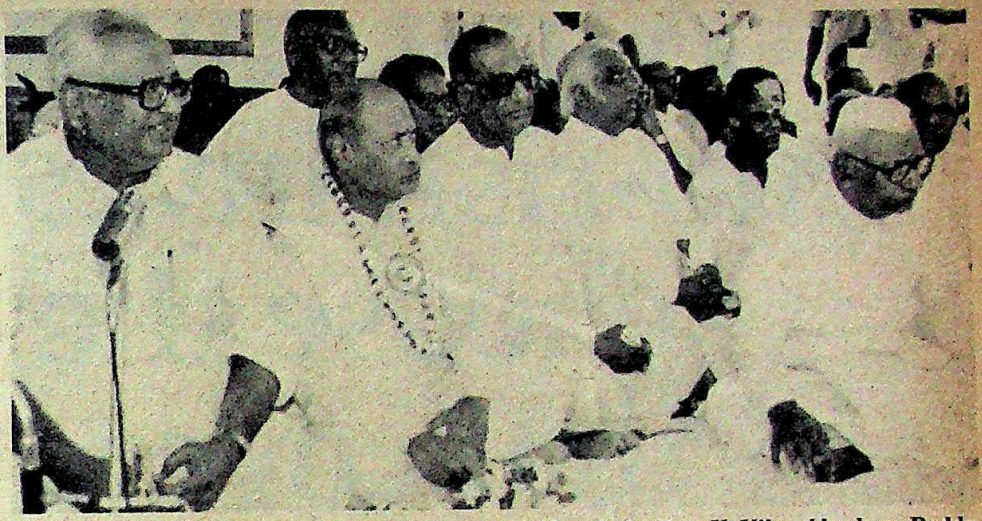
—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

ANDHRA PRADESH

Congress Hoopla



THE VENUE was most appropriate for a long overdue, morale-boosting show of strength. Just beside the calisthenics arena at the Corporation Stadium in Vijayawada stood the dais from which the Congress(I) publicly flexed its muscles last fortnight. For the first time since its electoral rout in the state just a little more than a year ago, all factions of the party, with the exception of the recalcitrant Channa Reddy group, had gathered on one platform. Among the political luminaries who suspended their various quarrels to attend what was billed as the State Panchayati Raj



NAGENDER RAO

(From left) ex-chief ministers J. Vengala Rao, P.V. Narasimha Rao, K. Vijayabhaskara Reddy, T. Anjiah and K. Brahmananda Reddy at the convention: show of strength

Convention were all former chief ministers of the state, except ex-president Sanjiva Reddy and Channa Reddy, all Union ministers from the state, MP's and MLA's.

The cut-out of the Youth Congress emblem that hung prominently from a crossbar was symbolic. The party was obviously readying itself to take on Rama Rao in the coming Lok Sabha elections. The ostensible aim of the convention was to resist the plan to decentralise district administration recently evolved by the ruling Telugu Desam.

Biased Move: Undoubtedly the Government's plan was inspired by self-interest. In the absence of committed cadres like those of the DMK or AIADMK in neighbouring Tamil Nadu, the party urgently needs to capture power at the grassroots. The idea is to create Mandal Panchayats by dividing the existing Panchayat Samithis into three or four, so as to take the number from 330 Panchayat Samithis to about, 1,200 mandals. This would give the ruling party a decisive advantage in distributing money from the development purse and thus build steady support where it needs it. In the process, the present controllers of the Panchayat Samithis, most of whom are Congress(I) supporters, would lose their seats of power.

Cashing in on this widespread fear among the Congress(I) ranks, the Vijayawada convention was timely, though it ultimately turned out to be a political jamboree in which speaker after speaker accused the Telugu Desam of misrule. So the convention ended with resolutions on rising prices, law and order, power supply, land reforms and land revenue, apart from recording its "emphatic protest against the Government's autocratic, unwarranted and hasty measures to destabilise Panchayati Raj institutions".

Some of the speakers hinted at a possible agitation that may eventually lead to the dissolution of the Assembly if the Government failed to give up its plan. A section of the younger Congressmen like V. Hanumantha Rao were actively canvassing for a bandh to heighten the confrontation, but they were persuaded by senior party men to put it off.

Said V. Jagpathi Rao, member of the Legislative Council from Karimnagar district: "The party rank and file have fully recovered from the shock of last year's electoral debacle. Vijayawada is the starting block from which we take off as a united force, forgetting group rivalries, to resist all attempts to dislodge those elected democratically to the Panchayat Samithis and Panchayats."

Added Kurla Raja Reddy, the tribal president of the Maredumilli Panchayat Samithi in East Godavari district: "The Telugu Desam is continuing the old programmes with new names and want to remove us from the samithis to have their own people. The Congress(I) has its faults but we knew what was happening."

Vitriolic Speeches: The convention did little in that direction. The speeches were a fusillade of charges against Rama Rao. Former chief minister J. Vengala Rao compared the catapulting of Rama Rao to power to "giving a stone to a mad man" while T. Anjiah, described the state Cabinet as a group of playback singers.

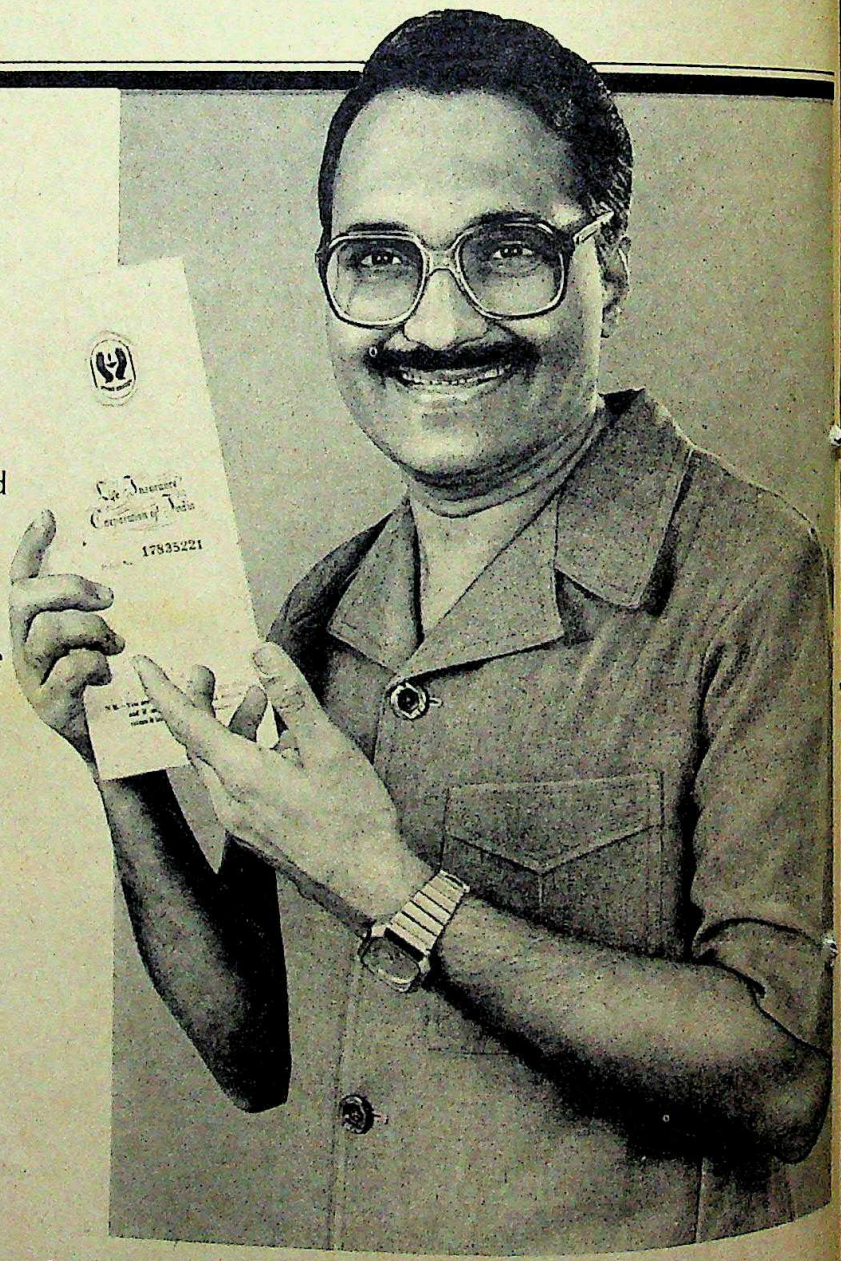
Countered Telugu Desam General Secretary P. Upendra: "The Congress is bent on creating chaos but we are ever ready to face the challenge." He called for a new conference the day after the convention to make a point by point, speaker by speaker rebuttal of the criticism. He said: "Even a year after their defeat, the Congressmen are behaving like spoil-sports."

Meanwhile J. Vengala Rao confirmed that he is well on his way back to Mrs Gandhi's fold. They parted ways—quite literally—after the 1977 Congress split, with both taking meticulous care not to cross each

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other in their tours of the cyclone-ravaged areas of the state. His rejoining the Congress(I) has not been formalised but as one ardent Vengala Rao supporter said: "He will be active if only he is put in charge wholly, for he is definitely a cut above the rest."

The arrival of Vengala Rao will make it even more difficult for Mrs Gandhi to pick her man to lead the state unit of the party through the elections. He seems to have staked his claim for the job. Said he: "Rama Rao will be swept out of office before the end of 1984." But Rama Rao was as contemptuously dismissed before the state elections last year. Mrs Gandhi will have to weld a strong and united state unit if the Congress(I) is to present a credible alternative. The Vijayawada exercise is an important first step in that direction.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

WEST BENGAL

Rivals Resolve



THE NEWS last fortnight that Subrata Mukherjee, 37, and Somen Mitra, 40, had buried the hatchet, seems to have ended what had become the most celebrated of rivalries within the Congress(I) in West Bengal. The announcement though was greeted with scepticism, if not outright disbelief by most Congress(I) leaders in the state. "Wait till they hatch out whatever scheme they're up to and you'll find them at each other's throats once again," cynically predicted a senior member of the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee(I) (WBPCC-I).

But behind this scepticism is genuine apprehension for Mukherjee and Mitra together would constitute a formidable combination, capable of being the decisive force in Congress(I) politics in the state. The AICC(I) plenary session and the anti-Farooq Abdullah demonstrations during the opposition conclave have proved that neither can be left out of any programme involving the state Congress(I).

Denying Responsibilities: Rarely considered for holding responsible positions in the party because of their well publicised and often bitter rivalry, the two leaders appear to have realised their disadvantage sometime last year. "Our rivalry has always been exploited by senior leaders of the party for their own political ends," said Mukherjee, looking back with regret at all the lost opportunities. Mitra too remarked about "a

CHANNA REDDY

Off and Running

AFTER a year's sabbatical during which he kept a surprisingly low political profile, former Andhra Pradesh chief minister M. Channa Reddy was off and running last fortnight. The 65-year-old Congressman, who quit a governorship for the second time last January, had made it clear when the newly reconstituted Andhra Pradesh Congress-(I) Committee(I) (APCC-I) was formed last October that he was unwilling to be treated as just another of the state's ex-chief ministers. As he stayed away from the APCC(I) meeting and party conventions in both Bombay and Calcutta, speculation was becoming rife that the disgruntled partyman was soon going to opt out.

Sure enough, by last fortnight, he was off on a district-by-district tour of the state—except for Nellore, Prakasham and Kurnool—as a prelude to a convention of his followers on February 26, where he is expected to announce the formation of a new party. It will all, however, depend on the feedback he gets on this tour. Quipped Reddy, a former physician: "I trained to be a doctor and after practising for several years, I have realised the need to feel the pulse of the people."

As early as last December, some of his followers gathered at his Hyderabad residence with the appeal that he float a new party with a "national character, perspective, and Gandhian philosophy" But Reddy only asked them to wait for a while. Ironically enough, the resolution asking him to form a new party was moved by G.V. Sudhakara Rao, MLC, and a long-time thorn in the former chief minister's flesh.

Rao had been a vocal dissident in his cabinet, complaining about Reddy's style of functioning, the sullied image of the government, rampant corruption, and the personal weaknesses of the chief minister himself among other things. He resigned at the chief minister's behest in 1979. But Reddy has other supporters too—among those backing him are legislators K. Narasimha Reddy, Uma Venkatram Reddy, and MP Roda Mistry.

Serious Threat: It is precisely Channa Reddy's ability to win over his enemies that makes him a bigger threat to the Congress(I) than the Telugu Desam. And evidently, he means business. On his tour he explained at meetings that to be effective, a party would need to gather to itself at least 2,500 activists in each district. But it is a matter of speculation whether he himself can achieve this. Detractors point out that there are innumerable charges of corruption against him. They used this fact to advantage in September 1980, when Channa Reddy had to quit the chief minister's post.

Even earlier, in 1969, he had to resign his post as Union minister for steel, after his election to the Assembly was set aside on the grounds of corrupt electoral practices. His subsequent bid to launch a separatist Telengana agitation also proved to be a damp squib.

But he is certainly being taken seriously, and current political thought is that Channa Reddy's new party, if it is indeed announced, will make a dent in the strength of the Congress(I) when the Lok Sabha polls are called. In fact, feelers have been sent from Kerala as well, where the breakaway group calling itself the Kerala unit of the Indian National Congress invited Channa Reddy to attend their convention. He declined, for the moment.

Meanwhile the Congress(I) has shown a reluctance to dismiss Channa Reddy and his followers on charges of anti-party activity. Channa Reddy has certainly kept up his end of the battle—he termed the Congress(I)'s convention of February 5 an exercise in futility. Whether his own convention scheduled for later in the month will end up likewise remains to be seen.

—AMARNATH K. MENON



K. MARUTHI PRASAD

Channa Reddy: breaking away

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coterie of inefficient and scheming senior party leaders" that had so long covered up their own shortcomings and the decline of the Congress(I) in the state, by constantly harping on the rivalry.

On September 13 last year, the two met to establish a "working understanding" at a political level. According to the compromise agreement, Mukherjee would be recognised as the undisputed leader of the party's student and labour organisations, while Mitra would be the boss of the youth organisation. This first bid at achieving some sort of unity had been dictated to a large extent by directives from AICC(I) General Secretary Rajiv Gandhi, who had at that time begun floating ambitious plans for revamping party organisations throughout the country.

However, in spite of all these efforts, the first attempt remained stillborn, as Mukherjee backed out. His ambition of assuming effective control of the state unit of the party appeared close at hand when the Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee offered him the post of general secretary of the reception committee for the plenary session. But subsequent events, like the appointment of Ashoke Sen as chairman of the reception committee, convinced Mukherjee of the need to resume the unity talks.

Peace Talks: Meeting again at the residence of a mutual friend, the two leaders agreed to appoint a few of each others' followers in the subcommittees assigned to them. Adhip Mukherjee, one of Mukherjee's closest aides, was made the secretary of Mitra's subcommittee. Yet, the talks did not diminish their mutual distrust, for Mukherjee did not attend the prime minister's public meeting on December 30 in Calcutta, for fear of getting heckled by Mitra's followers.

Determined to "patch up their differences through positive actions," as Mitra puts it, the two leaders met at his residence on January 31, to work out a joint proposal on a new WBPCC(I) team for submitting to the party high command. In the name of forming a "cohesive team of like-minded persons" for leading the WBPCC(I), the two leaders worked out a plan according to which, both the posts of WBPCC(I) general secretary and the leader of the Opposition in the Assembly would be given, to persons, who, apart from being respected in the party and being acceptable to the West Bengal electorate, will not pose a threat to their political ambitions.

Compromise Candidates: "Abdus Sattar is one person who enjoys the respect of most party workers, and at the same time is not the sort who will try to eliminate either of us politically," commented Mitra, candidly. In that case, Dr Sisir Bose, the MLA from Calcutta's posh Chowringhee constituency would be favoured for the thus vacated slot of leader of the Opposition.

If their proposal is accepted by the party high command then it would constitute a coup for the two leaders, who have not proposed their own names for sharing the post of the WBPCC(I) general sectetary. Their unity is still fragile, and disconcerted senior leaders of the party are still determined to scuttle their grand alliance and hopes of winning the party's control. But if the two can cement their new relationship, the course of Congress(I) politics in the state is certain to take an intriguing turn.

BIHAR

Caste Battle



THE SURVIVORS of the Piparia massacre are making sure that their tragedy is not forgotten in a hurry. Last fortnight the three children who lived to tell the tale of horror, set out with a group of Janata Party workers on a 150 km padyatra from Piparia to Patna. They could not have chosen a better way to gather sympathetic crowds.

Gathering crowds was, however, not the only purpose of the exercise. The survivors of the tragedy are becoming a focal point in the constant tug-of-war between competing caste groups in the state. The padyatra itself was launched by Professor Jabbar Hussain, a young Sarvodaya worker who wants to make Piparia the starting point of a battle against exploitation by upper caste landlords. Janata Party leader Karpoori Thakur drove the same point home when he met the padyatris and stressed that the backward castes should unite and fight against social injustice and landlords who were using them against each other. Said Thakur: "The series of killings in Piparia and nearby areas was the game of the landlords to maintain supremacy in the area."

Clever Ploy: Thakur's charges are not entirely baseless. Police working on the case are gradually veering round to the conclusion that the Bhumihar landlords have been pitting one backward caste against another. Initially, the police began working on the confession made by Kajla Dhanuk, one

K.M. KISHAN





Kajla Dhanuk (top) and Karpoori Thakur with the Piparia survivors: gruesome episode

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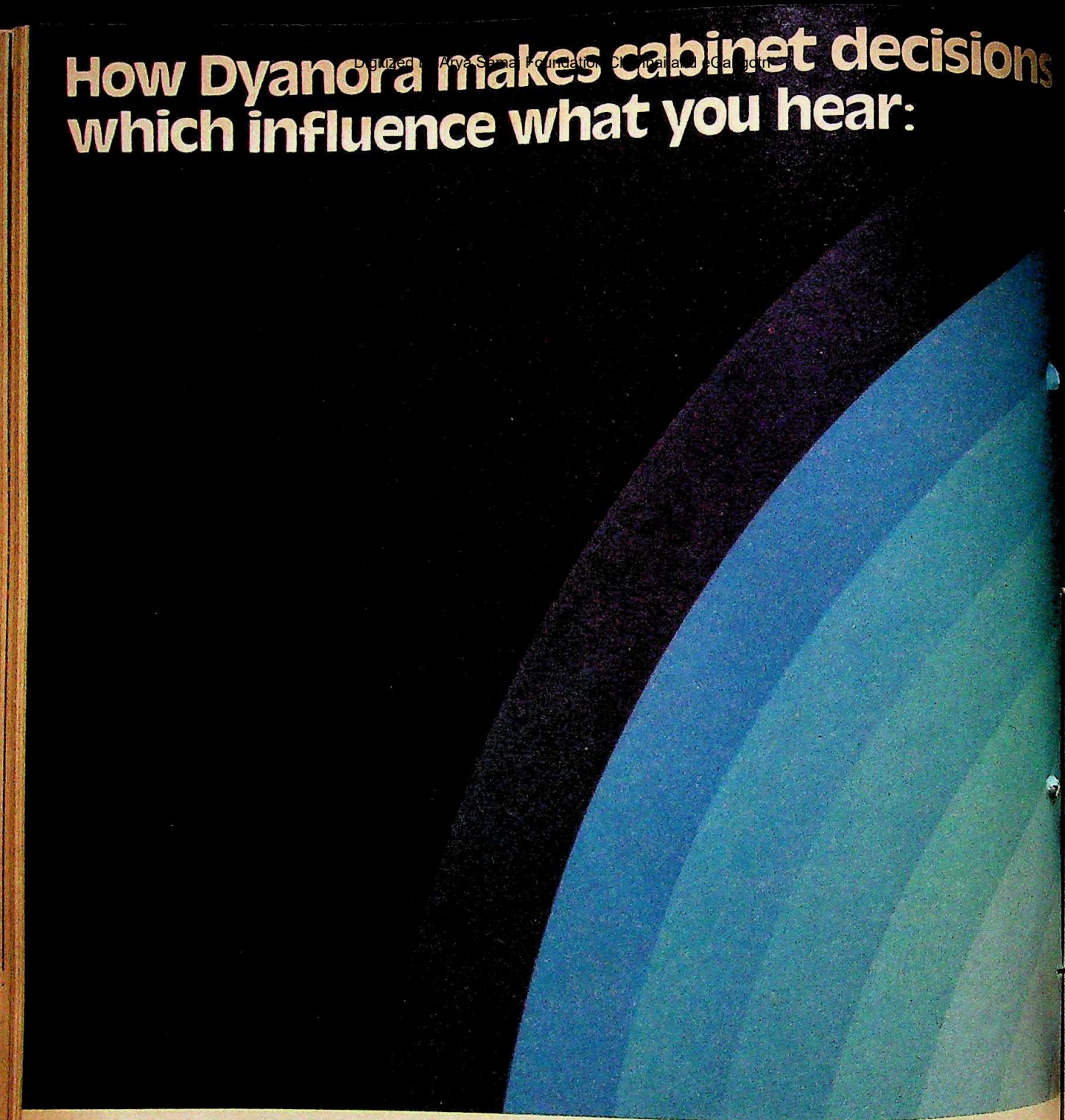
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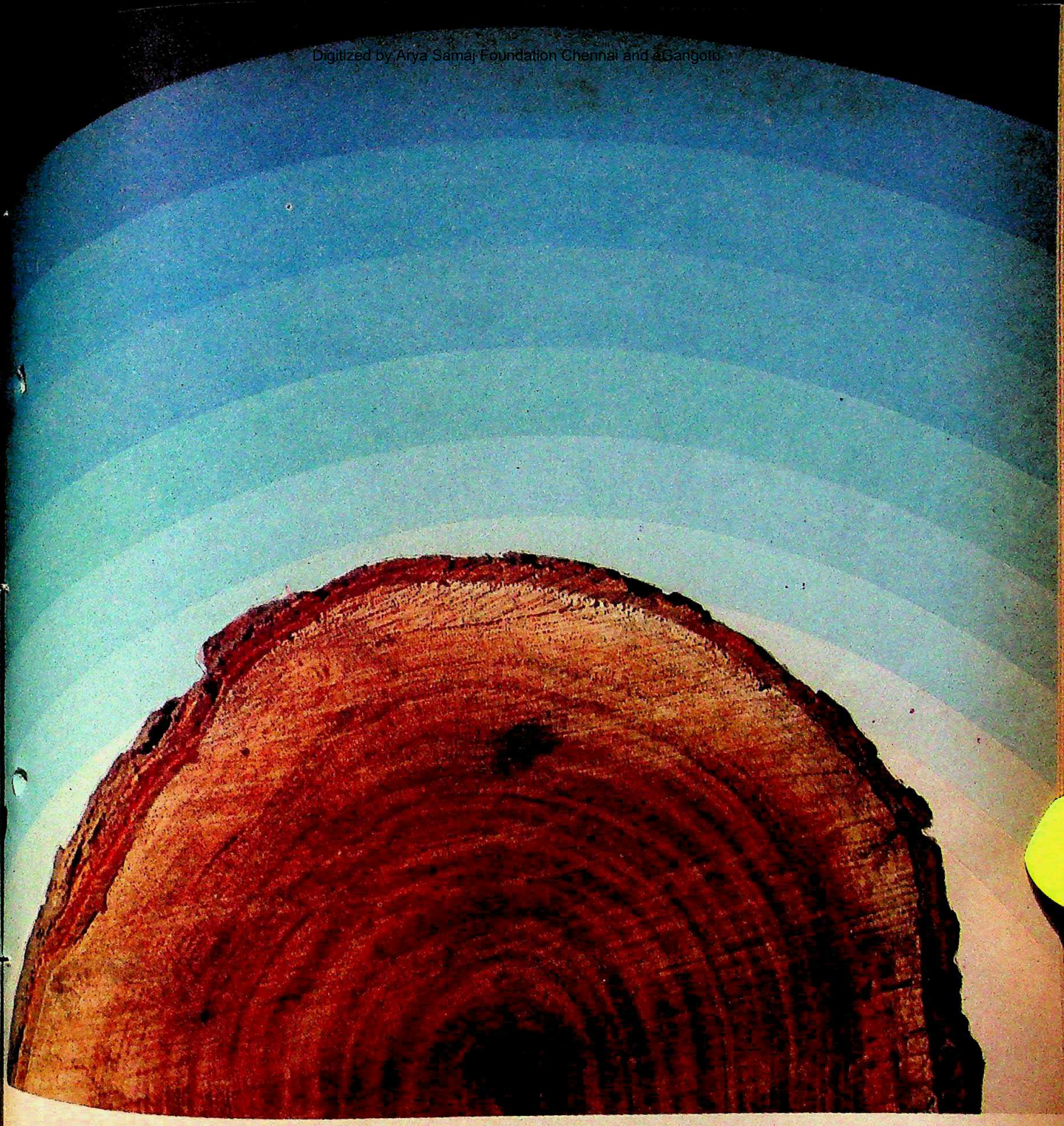
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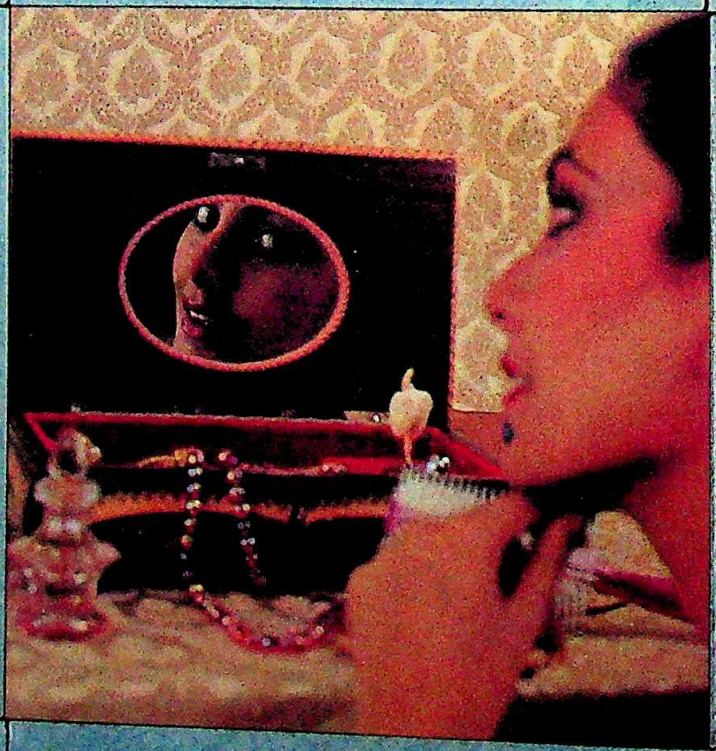
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the main accused in the case, in which he said that he had been hired by a group of Bhumihars. Kajla later retracted his confession when he came up before the Lakhisarai subdivisional magistrate but the police believe that many of the statements in the confession are pointers in the right direction. Says Monghyr Superintendent of Police Rajiv Ranjan Prasad: "It is now clear that Kajla and his associates were simply used by the Bhumihars of the area to finish the Yadavs."

Police investigations show that the Bhumihars were troubled by the increasing power of the backward Yadavs in the area. For a start the Yadavs had acquired tracts of land much to the displeasure of the landlords. Apart from this they also held most of the assembly seats in the district. Says Prasad: "The Bhumihars of the area always tried to outmanoeuvre the Yadavs and they again succeeded here."

Kajla Dhanuk was originally hired by a Bhumihar named Prakash Singh of Chaitan Tola village. Prakash Singh was involved in a running feud with a certain Karu Singh of Khutahadih village. Both hired gangs to fight their battles for them—Prakash Singh hired Kajla and Karu Singh hired another gang led by a man named Ramji Dhanri. The confrontation between the two gangs, however, was avoided.

The Bhumihars were also searching for an opportunity to teach the Yadavs a lesson and by all accounts Kajla too had his own scores to settle with them. In 1980 a villager named Kailash Yadav had been responsible for killing a relation of his and also for the murder of four Dhanuks. Prakash is said to have instigated Kajla by telling him that the victims of the massacre were Kailash Yadav's men.

Brutal Slaying: In his statement Kajla admitted that he and his men had taken the victims into the bushes and throttled them one by one with lathis. Later he said, when the police search began he sent his men back to cut the bodies into little pieces and throw them in the Ganga. Four days after the killings Kajla's uncle and nephew were killed and some Dhanuk houses destroyed.

Whatever the legal value of the confession, the police are obviously proceeding on the assumption that bits of it are true. They have already arrested 24 of the 44 people mentioned in the first information report. More significantly they have also proceeded against several upper caste leaders operating in the area including Tikker Singh, Amar Singh, Langra Singh and Susan Singh. Since they have not been able to get their hands on Prakash Singh they have attached his property. The police also had an encounter with the gang of Ramji Dhanri in Diara but nobody was injured.

The police are, however, discovering that the going against both the upper caste and backward caste gangs is not very easy. Both enjoy an enormous amount of political patronage (*see* 'INDIA TODAY, February 15). This was again brought home when several upper caste gang leaders met at the residence of a former Congress(I) leader to chalk out a plan of action against the backward castes. Jabbar Hussain says defiantly: "The battle against injustice will start from Piparia." But as the different castes flex their muscles it seems only too likely that the backward castes will get the worst of the battle.

—FARZAND AHMED

MADHYA PRADESH

Forward March



FRAIL-LOOKING at 60, opposition leader Sunderlal Patwa of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is now on a long march which he hopes will end in the chief minister's chair. He is on a 2,200-km padayatra that started in Jagdalpur, Bastar, in south-east Madhya Pradesh late last month. By the time it finishes in late May in Jhabua on the state's western tip, Patwa will have taken in his stride 16 of the state's 45 districts. Accompanying Patwa on his odyssey are Khuwan Singh Shivaji, state general secretary of the BJP's Kisan Morcha and Virendra Pandey of the Yuva Morcha.

At a time when padayatras are associated with political saints, Patwa is candid about his aims: "I don't want to study Indian villages because I have been doing that for decades. This is a political padayatra. While the Government makes wildly exaggerated claims of progress, the truth is that it is looting the people like never before. We want the people to wake up and react angrily to the Government's behaviour."

It is in a sense an election campaign even before elections have been announced. With a strength of 62 in the 320-member Assembly, the BJP is the only party powerful enough to challenge the Congress(I). And the logic of getting people to "react angrily" is clearly that a vote lost by the Congress(I) will be a vote gained by the BJP. The party firmly believes that there is immense public resentment against maladministration. The aim is to tell the people about it and remind them that the BJP is around as a viable alternative.

Shrewd Reasoning: While Patwa's travels have not yet caused much alarm in the Congress(I), it is fairly certain that with every kilometre, his reputation will grow in the public mind and so will the impact of his speeches. Patwa reasons shrewdly that the padayatra is preferable to other vote-gathering methods because "in the Indian mind, if a person willingly accepts pain and discomfort, he is taken more seriously, his words carry greater weight"

There are two other objectives as well. One is clearly to stir local party units, infect them with election fever, and get them to work more actively in the field. The other is to collect funds: public purses, for example, Rs 1,051 in Kanker and Rs 1,100 at Keskal. And then there are other, large donations that are made by sympathisers behind closed doors.

To prove his point against the Government, Patwa aims to localise issues, pointing to examples of corruption and inefficiency in areas that people can easily comprehend: examples within Bastar, of a villager in Kondagaon, who was granted a loan of Rs 5,000 by a cooperative bank but had to pay Rs 2,000 in bribes; of a landlord in Ghodagaon, member of the local 20-point programme committee, who had land allotted in his son's name; of a tehsildar who got land in



SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

Patwa being greeted at Bastar: shrewd move

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his wife's name; of a villager in Amoda, whose name appears in a bank's ledger but who hasn't ever got a loan.

Anti-corruption Plank: Much of this is information that was collected by BJP workers late last year when, following a party directive, they went on mass contact tours to rural areas and tabulated the complaints received. Moreover, villagers have already started coming to Patwa, handing him memorandums of grievances. A large part of this will go into booklets that will be distributed, district-wise, before the elections.

There is also an attempt to hold the Government to record, against promises magnanimously made in the past. Patwa has called for information from collectors in districts he is touring, about how much has been spent on development during Congress(I) rule. In Bastar, for instance, he publicly demanded to know what had happened to dramatic and highly-publicised decisions announced in Jagdalpur in late 19

But ultimately, the impact of this extended tour will depend not on his ability to walk so much as his ability to communicate. In a state where communications are terrible, local units will play a vital role in making or breaking the padayatra.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR in K

POWs

Missing

FOR SOME time now, customs officials posted at the Wagah check-post on the India-Pakistan border near Amritsar, have been getting used to receiving groups of men with nothing to declare. The group of 52 Indian prisoners, who came in last fortnight after languishing in Pakistani jails for years brought along very little else than pain and misery.

But they at least brought a word of hope for the families of about 40 Indian army, air force and navy men declared missing in the 1971 war and believed to be still in Pakistani jails. In the course of debriefing by intelligence agencies, the prisoners repeatedly talked of the presence of Indian defence services officers in Pakistani jails and even mentioned names of five. These tally with the list of 43 prepared by the Indian authorities.



R.L. Suri: sustained campaign

Shocking State: Sources say in some cases that the names did not tally completely with those on the list but it is understandable since most of the returning prisoners were illiterate in the first place. Moreover, over half of them have gone insane due to maltreatment and extended sentences.

The Union Home and External Affairs ministries are in the process of making a fresh overture to the Pakistan Government to carry out a search in its jails for the Indians. However, officials are wary of saying anything on record since they feel there is still not enough to conclusively prove that the Indian POW's still languish in Pakistani jails.

One person who will disagree on this is Dr R.L. Suri, the 66-year-old yoga therapist who, besides running his small yogashram on the small hillock behind the capital's Birla Mandir, has been carrying on a campaign for over a decade now for the release of his son, Major A.K. Suri of the Assam Regiment who he believes is still in Pakistani custody.

Hope: Dr Suri received two letters from his son in 1974-75 from Pakistan which have been verified by the Defence Ministry to be genuine. "Both Indian and Pakistani governments know we have irrefutable proof of my son being there. I don't know what stops them from doing something concrete," he says, pleading that the prospects of his son's return would be safer if the whole thing was kept away from publicity.

Former national badminton champion Damyanti Tambey believes her husband, Flight Lieutenant V.V. Tambey was captured alive after his Sukhoi was shot down because the Pakistani newspapers announced his arrest the next day. Later the Pakistani Government claimed the reports were incorrect.

The Pakistani authorities dismiss with similar argument the case of G.S. Gill who believes that his brother Wing Commander H.S. Gill is still alive in Pakistan. Wing Commander Gill commanded a MiG-21 squadron based at Jamnagar and led daring daylight missions over the Pakistani radar base in Badin till his aircraft was shot down on December 15.

Radio Pakistan proudly announced his arrest. Later the Pakistani authorities told International Red Cross that the news was incorrect. Similarly Rina Ghosh, wife of Major A.K. Ghosh, has for evidence a picture of her husband in a Pakistani jail carried by *Time* magazine.

Concrete Claims: That the Indian Government too does not dismiss this all as sheer optimism is obvious from the interest with which it has pursued the relatives' demand for a thorough search in Pakistani jails for the missing Indian soldiers. In fact, in a mission shrouded in secrecy, a six-member Indian team led by Dr Suri and including, among others, G.S. Gill and Damyanti Tambey was invited to visit Pakistani jails.

But the Pakistani authorities took the team only to the Multan jail displaying to them just the 160 prisoners due for release this year. Says a disappointed Suri: "This was a farce. We were deceived. If the Pakistanis had nothing to hide why did they not allow us to go and see the rest of the jails?" The relatives and the Indian Government are now trying for yet another visit, and according to sources in South Block the response from Pakistan has so far been encouraging.

Officials believe the POW's had got left out in the initial exchanges due to the confusion caused by political turmoil in Pakistan following the war. And since then the Pakistan Government has not been able to find a face-saving device to avoid the embarrassment of having violated the Geneva Convention for so long. Explained G.S. Gill: "It will be a big embarrassment for them. That is why we do not want much publicity on this. For their government will have to deny it and then stick to the denial."

But POW's apart, the returning prisoners have posed certain other questions. Practically each one of them was tortured in Pakistani jails and each served a jail sentence much longer than that handed out by the court. For example Satoo Saka, an Assamese tribal was jailed for one year for illegally crossing the border but had finished seven when he returned. For Qutubuddin of Jammu, three months became eight years. The lone women in the group, 30-year-old Leela Devi of Saharanpur was three years in the jail instead of the three months that she should have spent. Returning prisoners had gory tales of torture, humiliation and sodomy to tell.

According to the South Block estimates there are still about 500 Indian prisoners in Pakistani jails. While it may still be a question whether these include POW's the least the Indian Government could do is to get them a more humane deal.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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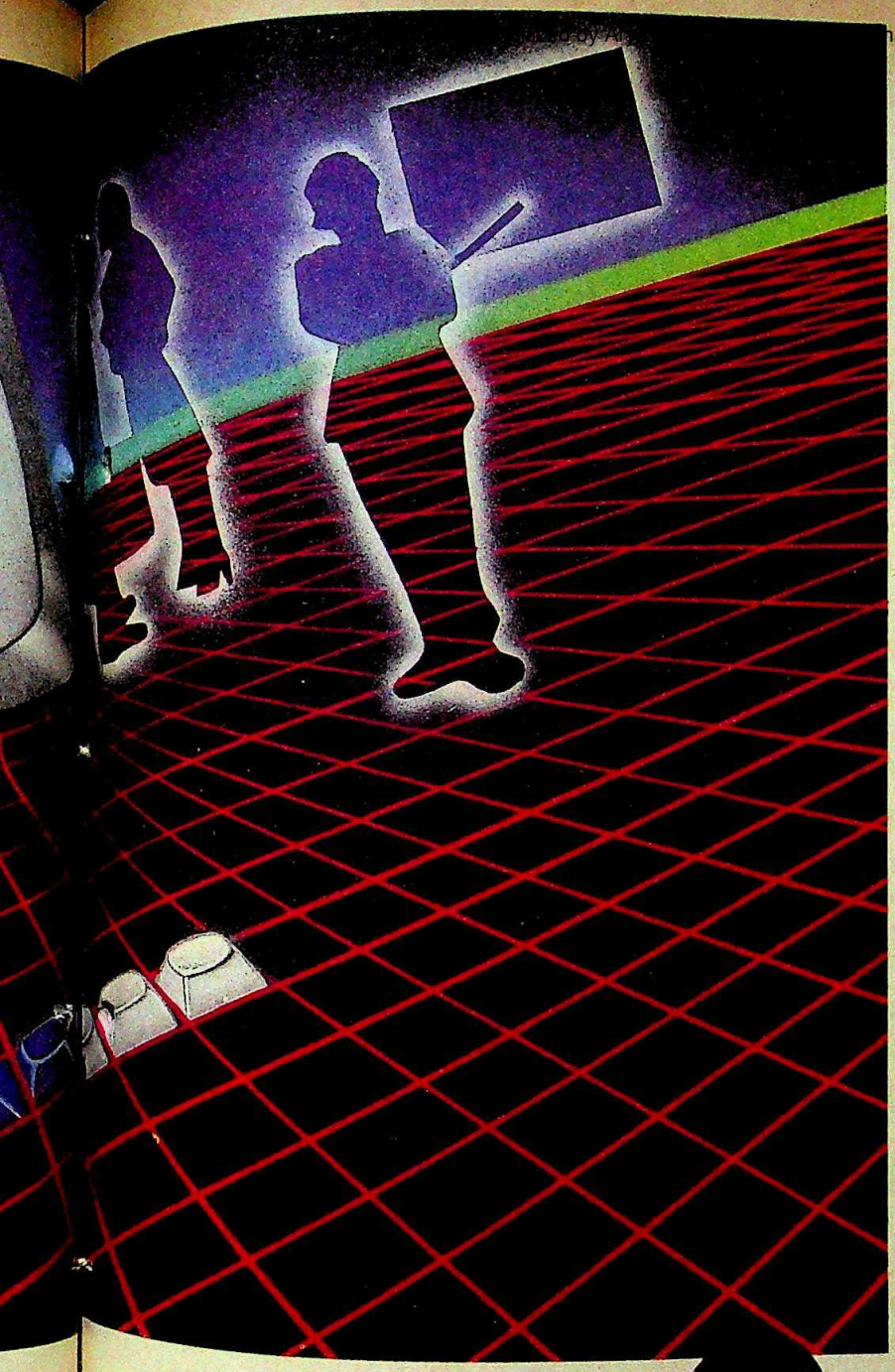
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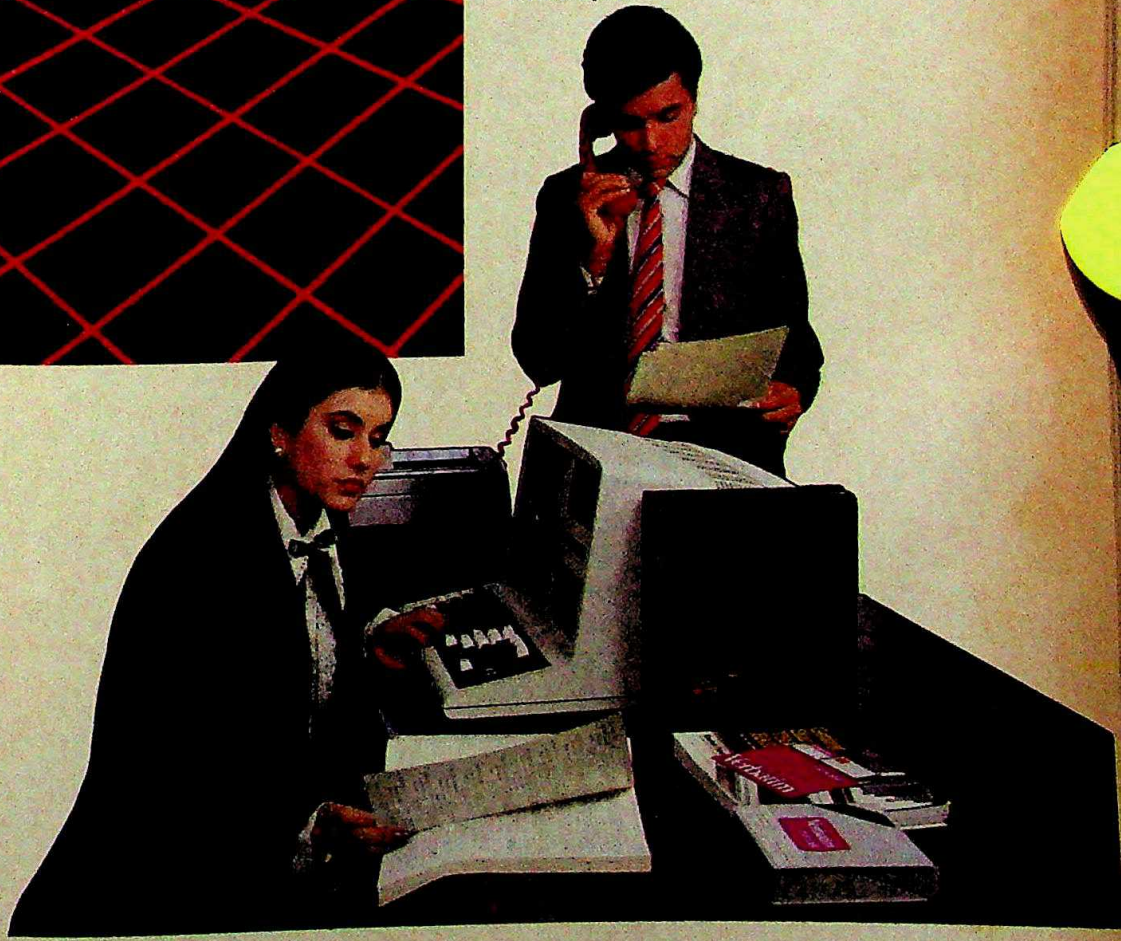
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BOMBAY

In a Jam

BOMBAY motorists, snarled continuously in unending traffic jams and forced to halt repeatedly before a series of traffic lights, are convinced that doomsday is around the corner as far as the city's traffic is concerned. Many feel that the vehicular confusion has been only worse confounded by the city's enterprising traffic chief P.S. Pasricha, who, about two years ago, launched an ambitious traffic programme to set things right.

Indignant letters to newspapers complaining about the traffic innovations have been a recurring feature, but of late several important personalities have entered the fray. Maharashtra Congress(I) President N.M. Kamble was quick to blame Pasricha when he turned up 15 minutes late for a press conference. Bombay's transport service authorities have complained about their buses being held up and stops being continuously relocated. Congress(I) MP from south Bombay, R.R. Bhole says that when he complained last year in November, he was told once computerisation for the signals was installed, everything would be set right. He returned in January from Delhi to find "things even worse than before".

Last week Chief Minister Vasantrao Patil decided to have a firsthand look at the hub of the old business district popularly known as Flora Fountain. He got more than he bargained for. Angry shopkeepers from the area, members of various associations including residential associations, pedestrian associations and the Save Bombay Committee turned up waving anti-Pasricha banners and virtually gheraoed Patil. The result: a suspension of all further traffic plans until re-studied by a review committee consisting of citizens' representatives, but headed by Pasricha.

Daily Chaos: Bhole insists that something must be radically wrong when it takes him only 15 minutes to walk from his house opposite the Cooperage to his office at Flora Fountain and longer than this to drive by car. Not only does he have to pass through five traffic signals on his route, but even getting out of his parking alley takes several minutes. One cause for the confusion is that though 81 new micro-processor coordinated signals have been installed they have still to be coordinated by computer, something Pasricha hopes to do shortly.

What is annoying people even more is that with traffic modernisation plans, the traffic island gardens are being uprooted. Said Bhole: "Pasricha would have calmly removed the garden around Ambedkar's statue if we hadn't been extra vigilant." The de-beautification of the business centre is most striking at Flora Fountain which has lost its historic character and has been converted into one gigantic parking plaza.

Citizens' groups complain that pedestrians get the lowest priority in the present traffic plans, what with over 4.5 lakh vehicles on the road and traffic increasing by over 10 per cent a year. Kisan Mehta, president of the Save Bombay Committee, notes that while private cars and taxis are allowed to park on most important arteries such as D. Naoroji, Mahatma Gandhi, Veer Nariman and P. Mehta roads, buses have been relegated to all the side roads. Flora Fountain-bound buses have to take a long, circuitous route delaying 8,000 bus commuters per hour.

Bus commuters from Mahatma Gandhi road have to trudge an extra 200 m crossing two traffic intersections. Iconoclastic people's rights activist Indira Jaisingh in fact talks darkly of a "Pinto-Pasricha plan" to eliminate the common man from the heart of the business district. As she sees it—while Pinto, the municipal ward officer, is busy removing the hawkers, Pasricha is making life difficult for the pedestrians, all for the benefit of the car owners.

Slighted Pedestrians: Moreover, green signals come on for such short spells that pedestrians have literally to rush and cross before the light changes colour. Said Pasricha: "Pedestrians don't require to change into gear before crossing." He claims that 200 people at the Churchgate Railway Station entrance can comfortably cross the road in seven minutes flat. Mehta's statistics reveal that 8,000 private car passengers are being given precedence over 1,20,000 train commuters coming out of Churchgate every hour.

Car owners have their grievances as well. A Western India Automobile Association spokesman, while not condemning the plan outright, notes that thanks to various strategically placed no-entries, certain distances by car have been doubled. What is worse, even when the signals are synchronised they are based on the assumption that cars will move at 50 km an hour, an unlikely speed with traffic bogged down by potholes and heavy buses.

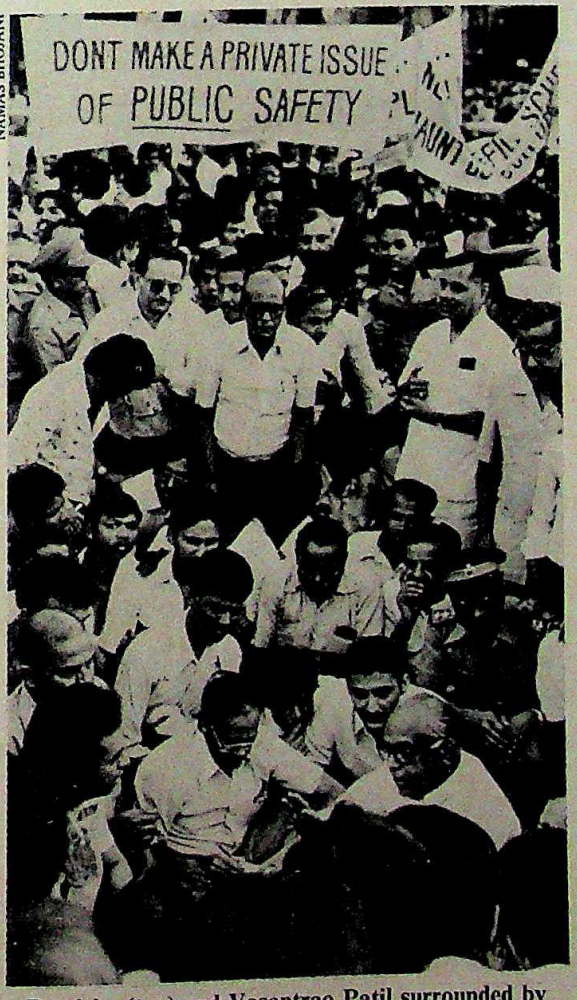
While Pasricha is receiving most of the flak, he does have a few admirers who feel that without him Bombay traffic would now be at a standstill and he should be given a chance to complete his plan. Said cricketer and industrialist Vijay Merchant: "We are a nation of grouchers and pettifoggers and Pasricha is a most maligned and misunderstood policeman." But whether Pasricha will be given the green signal to go ahead with his plans will depend largely on how soon he can give a green signal to the snarling traffic on Bombay's busy roads.

—COOMI KAPOOR

HARSH RAI



NAMAS BHOJANI



Pasricha (top) and Vasantrao Patil surrounded by angry commuters at Flora Fountain: chaotic state

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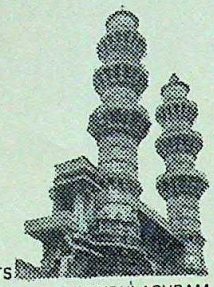
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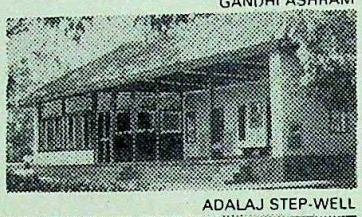
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The 15th century step-well at Adalaj is characteristic of Gujarat. Its stone steps lead deep below the ground to a reservoir of cool, clear water, past brilliantly carved stone-work at every level.



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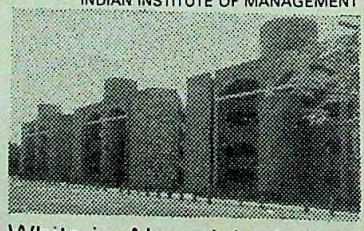
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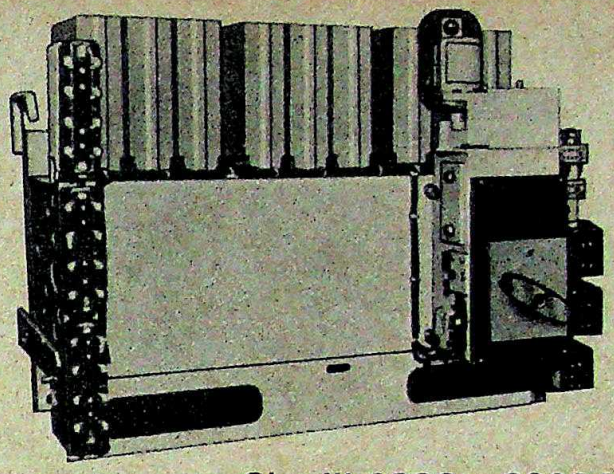
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GUJARAT TOURISM

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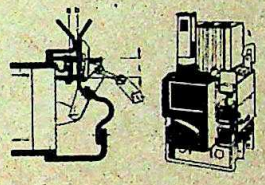
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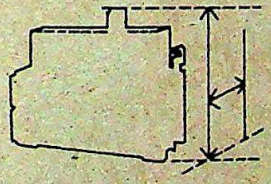
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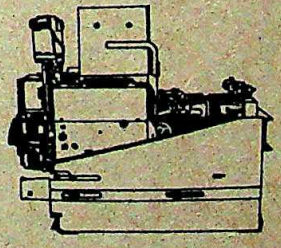
The new series of ACBs are made in four basic frame sizes. For all frame sizes many components are identical, permitting precision tooling for higher quality and lead to reduction of stocks kept and a uniform assortment of accessories.



65

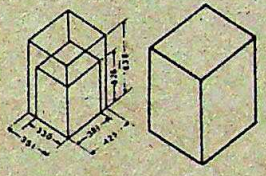
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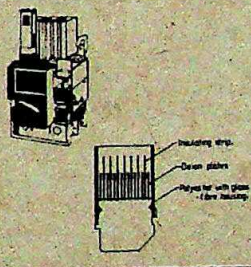
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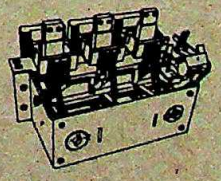
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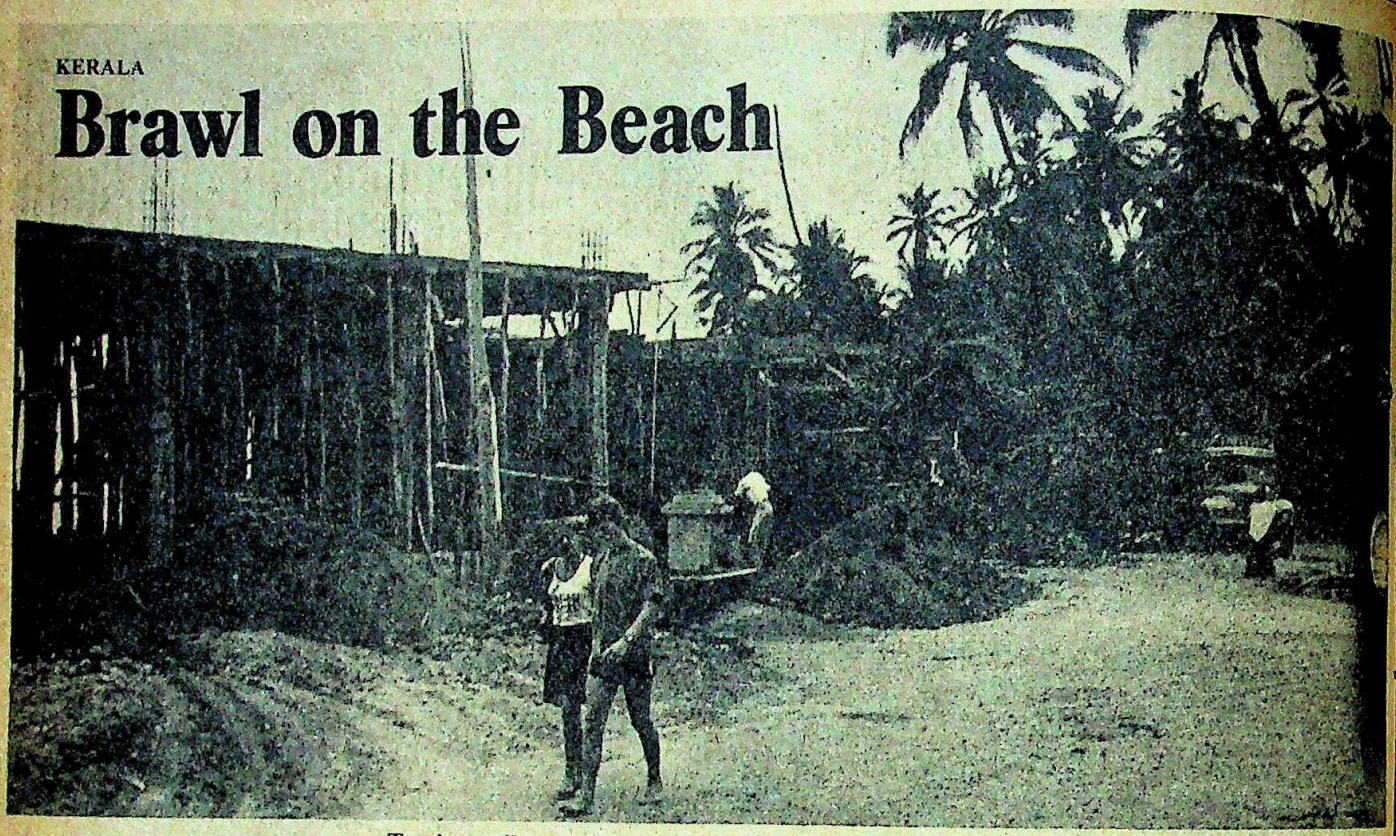
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KERALA

Brawl on the Beach



Tourists walk past the mosque under construction: religious row

THE SPECTRE of communal tension has constantly haunted Kerala. This is hardly surprising in a state where, more than anywhere else in the country, political battles are fought on unabashedly communal lines. The Nilackal controversy of last summer is still fresh in most minds. Last month it was becoming increasingly clear that the state Government would soon have to come to grips with the spectre once again. The trouble spot is an unusual one: the Kovalam Ashok Beach Resort, a mere half-hour drive from state capital Trivandrum, where an unauthorised mosque is being built, financed by large helpings of Gulf money.

Located a stone's throw away from the luxury cottages of the resort, the mosque is sending shivers down the spines of even hardened Kerala politicians, and for good reason: the RSS and the BJP have proclaimed their intention to stop the mosque from coming up. Last month, RSS sympathiser Subramaniam Appu, a Kovalam resident, asked that construction be stopped in a petition filed in the Kerala High Court against the state of Kerala, the India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC), the Vizhinjam sub-inspector of police—Vizhinjam is a fishing village nearby—and the Kovalam Muslim Jamaat, which runs the mosque. Says Appu: "We will stop the construction at any cost because it is going to affect tourism in Kovalam."

ITDC officials are no less concerned. For one thing the mosque does little to enhance the beauty of the picturesque beach. For another, loudspeakers rigged up on a coconut palm lustily broadcast namaz five times a day, disturbing the peace of the hotel's clients. Said a top official: "After the mosque comes, do you think the mullahs will allow nude sunbathing as it is done here today?" But the ramifications of the mosque go beyond tourism and, understandably, the ITDC general manager at Kovalam refuses to comment.

According to O. Abubacker, president of the Kovalam Muslim Jamaat and the man in charge of the mosque—he is also the cook at the hotel—the mosque is not situated in government land. "The said land was in the possession of the Jamaat from time immemorial," he says. When complete the mosque complex will include a madrasa. Although Abubacker claims that the building will cost only Rs 5 lakh, more realistic estimates put the figure close to Rs 30 lakh.

The beginnings of a potentially communal situation go back as far as 10 years. At that time ITDC had acquired the beach and the surrounding areas for its resort. There was a small thatched mosque on the beach. ITDC requested that it be shifted. The Government in its letter dated March 16, 1973—No. 83915 Pol.C1/72/PD—directed that immediate steps be taken to this end. ITDC agreed to bear the costs of removal. On inspection the then deputy collector found that the sea had eaten into most of the mosque land and that burials could not be carried out because of lack of space. The Kovalam Jamaat, ITDC and the Government got together and found another site. Accordingly, proceedings to acquire the land were set in motion and the award stage was reached as early as 1977.

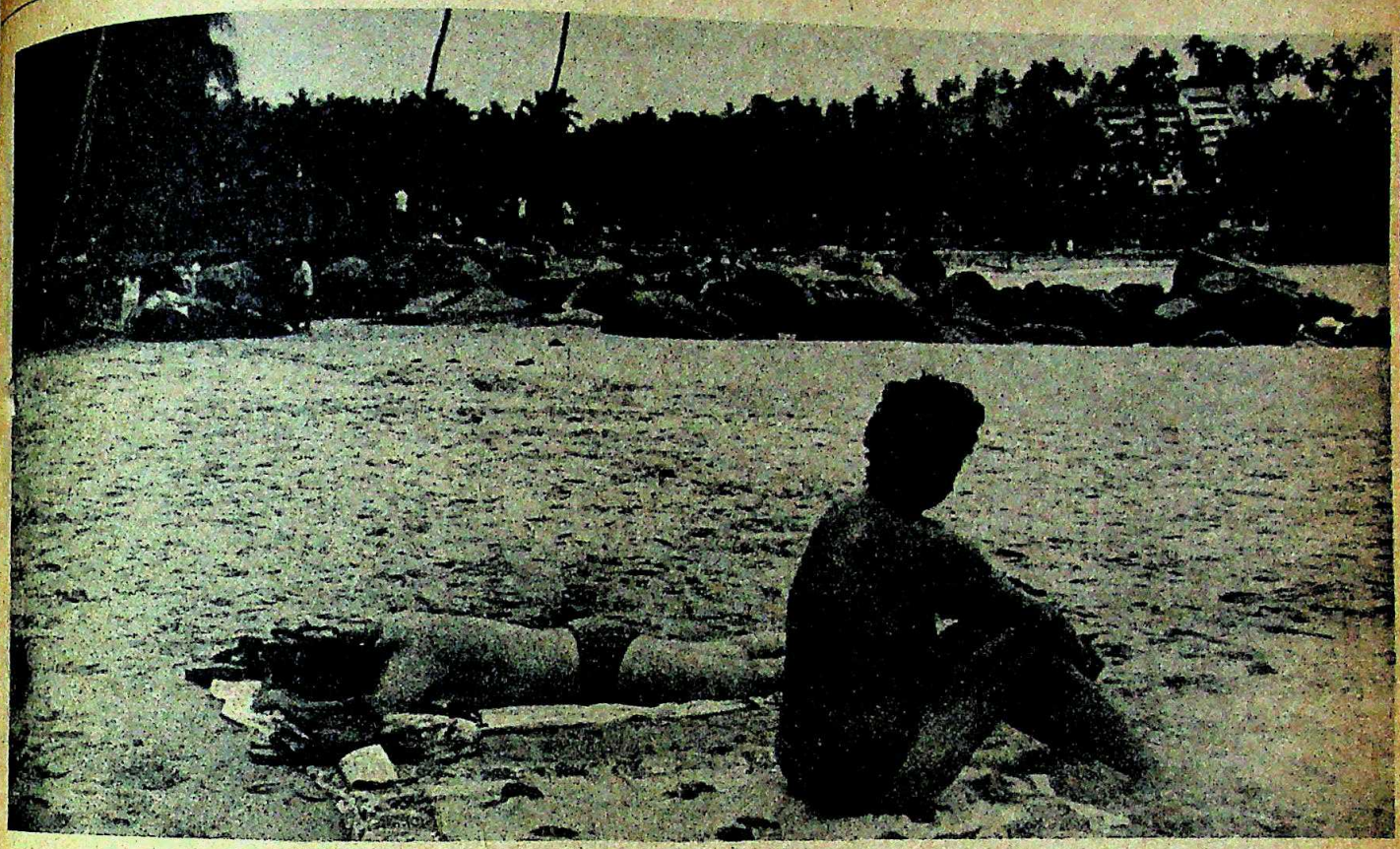


Jamaat leader Abubacker: adamant stand

Developing Situation: However, by that time, the Kovalam Jamaat tried to replace the thatched structure with a permanent construction. The then manager of the resort, Lt-Colonel M.S. Uthaya wrote two letters in three months warning the authorities of what was going on and reminding them of ITDC's willingness to pay the cost of shifting

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The Kovalam beach with the mosque in the background: mounting tension

the mosque. In his letter dated May 31, 1977—No. MBR/KOV/ (PAD-15-1)/77—Udhaya wrote: "The local community have completed the semi-permanent construction of the mosque. If these are not checked immediately, it will have serious repercussion on tourist trade in the coming season and the years ahead."

The powers that be can thus hardly say that they were not warned. Earlier, at a conference convened by the special secretary to the Government on March 3, it was decided to give compensation of Rs 12,000 to the Jamaat so that they could shift the mosque. ITDC made the payment only on July 22, 1983. And the Kovalam Jamaat authorities claim that they have not received any payment so far.

For six years after 1977 there were no major problems: the mosque remained as it was, with a tile roof. But with the coming of the Karunakaran Ministry, matters took a different turn. With the blessing of Cabinet ministers of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML)—the second largest constituent of the ruling front—the Kovalam Jamaat started renovating the mosque in early 1983. Incensed by this, local RSS stalwarts installed a shivling 35 m away, which was later removed by the police. The RSS and the BJP Kovalam unit started an agitation and also organised a dharna right in front of the ITDC office.

Meanwhile, the IUML was openly beginning to support the demand for a big modern mosque at Kovalam. Deputy Chief Minister Avukadar Kutty Naha spearheaded the renovation move. Naha and Muslim MP's from Kerala reportedly descended on Delhi to try and influence Union Tourism Minister Khurshid Alam Khan. The minister is reported to have told senior ITDC officials that a mosque in the beach resort would encourage Arabs to visit Kerala. Because of intense lobbying by Naha and the Muslim MP's, the Government reluctantly agreed to the renovation.

Nevertheless, there were certain conditions, which state Housing Secretary P.B. Pathak laid out in a letter/—No. 40773/U2/83/RD—to the collector dated December 26, 1983. The letter said: "The mosque may be allowed to come up at its present location subject to the following conditions:

- "The mosque will be allowed to be constructed up to a maximum height of 15 ft only from the ground level. The mosque authorities have agreed to this condition.
- "The mosque authorities will not be using mikes for broadcasting their prayers. They have agreed to this condition as well.
- "No burial ground will be allowed anywhere around the mosque. The mosque authorities have agreed to this condition as well."

But the mosque authorities do not seem to be sticking to the agreement. Last month, Deputy Collector T. Balakrishnan filed a confidential report—No. P-860/84—saying that the Jamaat people were violating rules and laws. Already the mosque's height is over 15 ft and when the roof and the dome are added the height is going to increase. The report also mentions the disturbance caused by the namaz broadcast five times a day and adds that the mosque authorities have not made any attempt to acquire an alternative site for a graveyard. He points out ominously: "There are indications that the BJP and the RSS might increase the tempo of their agitation."

Even as a seemingly petrified administration wonders what to do, construction goes on at a hectic pace day and night. Lorries and other vehicles carrying building material freely use the private road leading to the resort. The general manager has complained in vain to the police about the trespassers. The local tehsildar has also written to the collector, saying that "the miscreants of the locality may exploit the situation and a very serious law and order situation may also arise". The Government has had all the time in the world to prevent any eventual "serious law and order situation"; and if the worst fears come true they cannot say they were not warned.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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FASHION

Murjani the Survivor

IN THE notoriously fickle fashion market, merely to stay in the race requires the speed and reflexes of a Carl Lewis. Mike (Mohan) Murjani, 38, may not agree with the comparison but it is unavoidable. At a time when the designer jean market is rapidly shrinking—30 per cent in the last two years—Murjani International's corporate health seems as sound as ever. Obviously, the combination of finely-honed Sindhi business instincts and the now-famous Gloria Vanderbilt label manages to keep Murjani in the swim.

It also helps him take the kind of calculated risks that have made the Murjani name a by-word in fashion circles. When recession hit the industry two years ago, forcing major companies to shut down—Brittania, the $100 million jean manufacturer, abandoned ship in 1982—Murjani gambled on going aggressive. He says: "While other companies held back, we took advantage of the situation and got a better market share. We started adding more expenses, started advertising more and put more into the product."

When Murjani thinks of expanding, he thinks big. Over the past year, he has sold licences for use of the brand name 'Gloria Vanderbilt'—which he bought in 1982 for an undisclosed amount, estimated by trade papers at $25 million—to independent companies. These are now using the exclusive label to market a variety of merchandise, from shoes, handbags and belts through hosiery, ties and jewellery, to Vanderbilt perfume. The last reportedly has sales of $30 million in its first year on the market. Jeans are now only a quarter of his business.

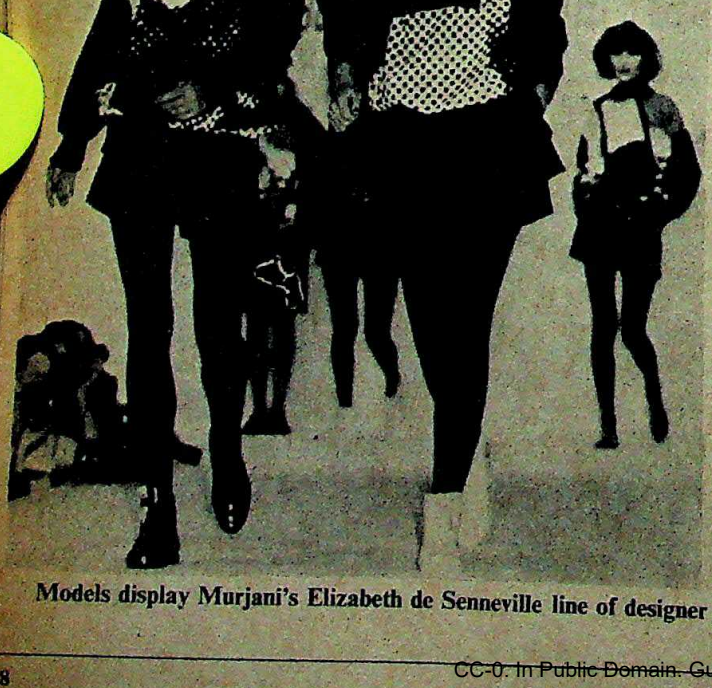
Tough Struggle: Murjani's drive to expand his commercial base is not just a measure of his success. There are rumours that he is struggling to keep his lead in the jean market. In 1980-81, trade newspapers claimed that he was paying the price for the company's extravagance—in the early years, it became known for its high profile publicity, often sponsoring extravaganzas and shows on Broadway.

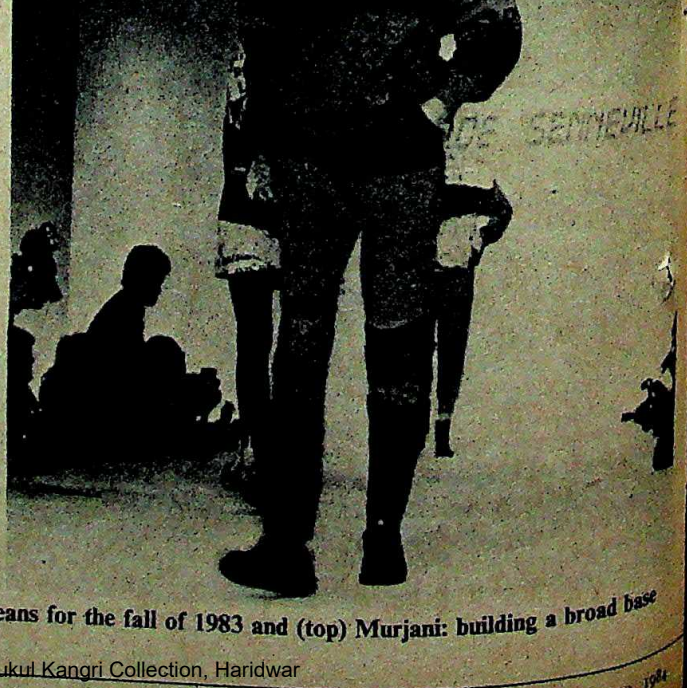


Around that time, Alan Gilman was brought in as company president and the corporate image veered sharply away from the volatile image it had when Warren Hirsh was president. Says Murjani: "Today we look like a solid, sound company. Previously, it was a high-flying situation."

However, this conservatism, combined with Murjani's renowned tight lip, makes it difficult to gauge the company's real position in terms of sales and profitability. In 1980 (INDIA TODAY, May 1-15, 1980), Murjani predicted a turnover of $1 billion for 1982-83. But he now discloses an annual turnover "in excess of $300 million". He refrains from making any further predictions.

Compared with other companies though, Murjani's does look healthy. It is among the top 25 garment manufacturers in America. Most of the other 8,800 manufacturers do business in the $5-10 million-a-year range. And even among the leading firms, most—for example, Levi Strauss, Bluebell (makers of Wranglers), and Puritan (of





Models display Murjani's Elizabeth de Senneville line of designer jeans for the fall of 1983 and (top) Murjani: building a broad base

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Calvin Klein fame)—are public companies.

Bleak Business: But whether public or private, most jeans manufacturers today are pessimistic. "There is no status left in jeans," says Brenda Gall, apparel analyst for the consultant firm Merill Lynch. Some manufacturers have been forced to close down.

Nonetheless, the Murjani-Vanderbilt connection continues rock-steady. Though it now forms only a minor part of his business, his initial success was based on an exclusive line-up of jeans designed by heiress Gloria Vanderbilt—But how long will Murjani's lush cow last?

It should be possible to exploit a designer name indefinitely, according to Jill Greenwood, apparel analyst with Kurt Salmon Associates, the leading consultant firm for the industry. "Provided a true identity is created, there is no reason why the name should lose its value," she says. Murjani evidently goes by this view. He has so much faith in the Vanderbilt label that he intends to open speciality stores to exclusively display Vanderbilt goods.

Diversifying Market: But Murjani isn't putting all his dollars in the Vanderbilt pocket. He says: "One of our strategies is that we want to create different designers to appeal to different consumers within the department store, so that we have different businesses running simultaneously." Next fall he will promote Roger Baugh, a fairly conservative menswear designer. Last fall, Murjani launched French designer Elizabeth de Senneville in the domestic market.

Unlike Vanderbilt, which sells among women between 25 and 50 in every part of the country, de Senneville is being sold at speciality stores in major cities, probably to younger customers. Says Murjani: "The Elizabeth de Senneville customer is an updated contemporary customer who would spend a lot more money on fashion." Dick Hosp, Murjani's marketing man, hopes that in the long run de Senneville will make over $40 million in sales.

Murjani also hopes to diversify to a different segment of the market. Cashing in on what trade papers call a revolution, he will launch a new line of lower-priced clothing aimed at the millions of potential customers as yet untapped by the designer boom. Other such products like Anne Klein II and Ralph Lauren II, which were launched earlier this year, are reporting good sales and retailers are optimistic about spring sales.

By next fall, Murjani hopes to sign on well-known French designers, who, once they are established in a higher bracket market, will be sold down to a broader consumer base. Explaining his diversification, he says: "The less you sell, the more exclusive you are. But if you want to do business, you've got to go broad."

—ROHINI NILEKANI

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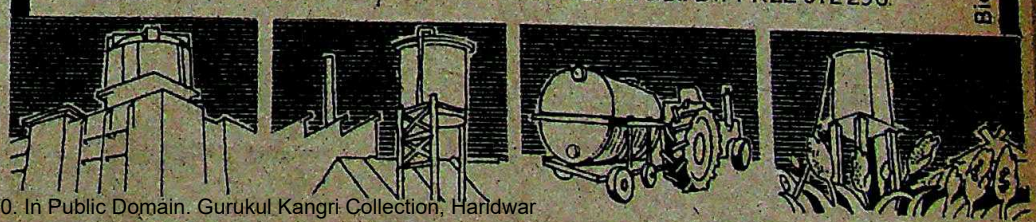
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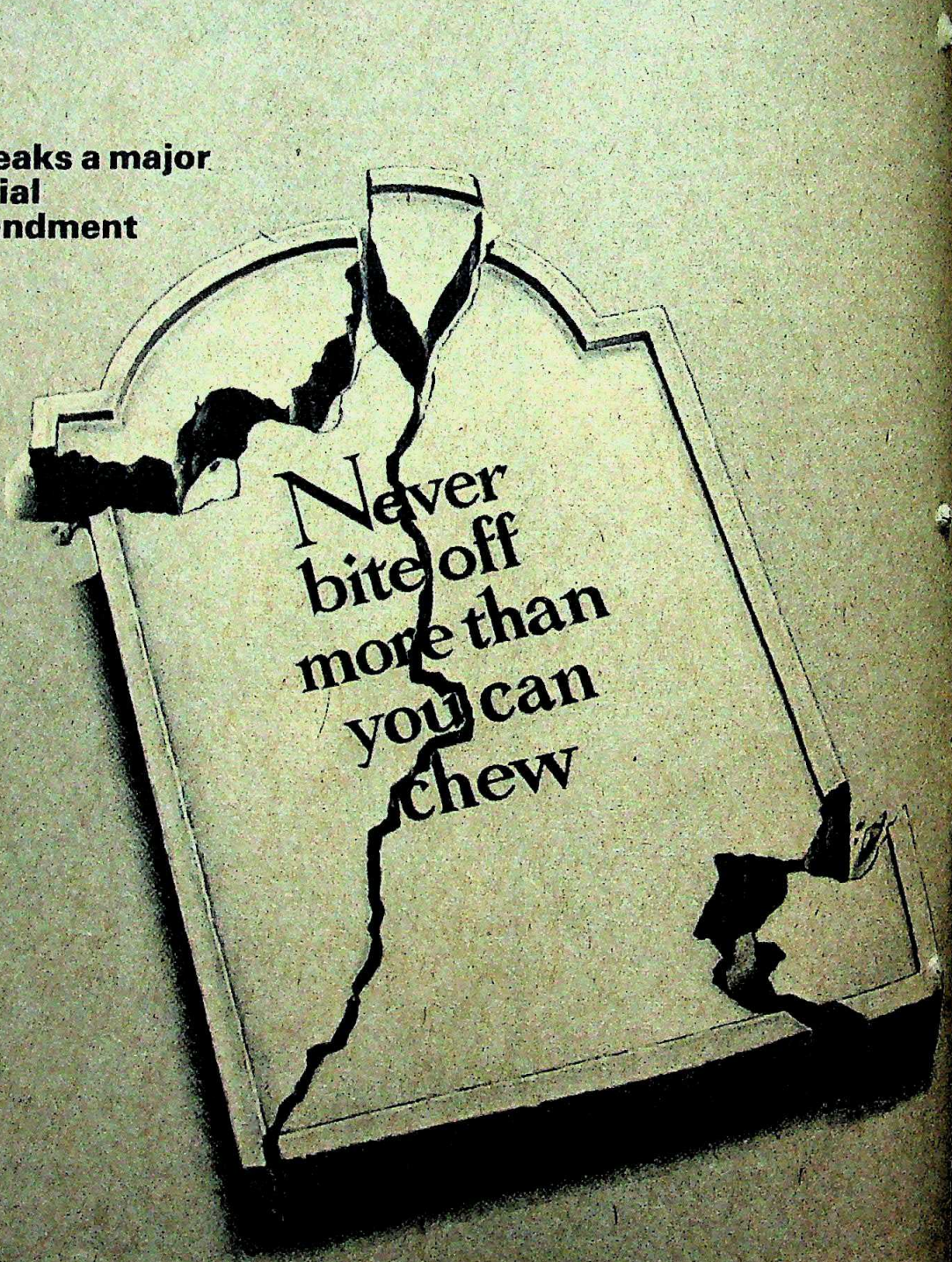
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KEC breaks a major industrial commandment



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Take the case of the no-break genset for the Rajasthan Atomic Power Plant, to cite just one example.

In the first phase of the Rajasthan Atomic Power Plant, Canadian General Electric supplied 300 kVA no-break gensets in 1965.

For the second phase, the Department of Atomic Energy, or DAE for short, decided to launch a major indigenization programme. When they floated tenders for the critical no-break gensets, not a single Indian manufacturer of electrical equipment responded. The uniform feeling was that nobody, but nobody in India could make them.

It was at this point that the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, recommended KEC for the job. DAE got in touch with us at KEC and asked our Chief Design Engineer to meet their consultants, Montreal Engineering Company, and talk things over. The consultants were understandably sceptical about our capabilities. The only condition on which they were willing to start a dialogue with us was to escalate the stringency of the specs.

The specs for the 400 kVA no-break genset required that the equipment should be highly reliable and suitable for continuous operation on a 24 hours per day basis. The genset could be shut down only on a planned basis once in 4 months. The loads connected to the high reliability Class II bus fed by these MG sets were very critical in their input requirements and so it was necessary to hold the steady state voltage and frequency variation within 1 percent of the set values. The transient specifications permitted were also extremely severe since a water pump driven by a very large induction motor had to be started without significant disturbance to the other connected loads.

The deal was on. We quoted and DAE gave us the go-ahead. We worked hand in hand with DAE. Their experience and constructive suggestions were invaluable. We pulled out all the stops and worked round the clock. The problems were many. Often we wanted to throw up our hands in despair. For instance, when one of our prestigious British associates on other projects took a look at the severity of the tolerances of the genset, they recommended that we should use a frame size suitable for a generator 5 or 6 times the capacity of the 400 kVA no-break genset. We decided to use our own brains and experience. We designed a 600 kVA frame for the application.

We supplied the first set in 1975. All checks were carried out to DAE's total satisfaction. On D-day, DAE pushed the button. And did our no-break genset live happily ever after? Sorry, this is not a fairy story, it's for real. When the set started rotating, the control system tripped. The set came to a halt. The redeeming feature was that the protection system had worked after all.

Within three months, with DAE's help, we re-designed the entire control panel. This time around when the button was pushed, the set went beautifully into action. It's still going great guns. Of course, there were minor teething problems. As a matter of fact we still continue to make improvements with DAE's active co-operation.

DAE have placed an order for 4 no-break gensets for the Madras Atomic Power Plant. In 1980, we won the order for four 325 kVA sets and 8 55 kVA control power supply sets for the Narora Atomic Power Plant in the teeth of stiff German competition. And, in 1979, DAE asked us to supply them two sets of 150 kVA for one of their research projects. To date, no other Indian manufacturer has entered the field.

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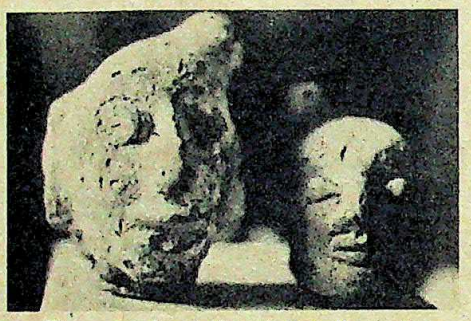
Forgotten Heritage

JUST a mile south of the quaintly French town of Pondicherry lies yet another relic of India's European connection. Arikamedu, a picturesque mound surrounded by casuarine trees on the banks of the Ariyankuppam river marks the spot of an ancient Indo-Roman archaeological site, dating back to somewhere between the second century B.C. and the second century A.D. But it took a foreigner to tell officials of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) how valuable the site was. Last fortnight, Tonjis Szoral, assistant director-general of antiquities and museums of Turkey who visited the place, impressed upon the Government of India that Arikamedu was "a very rich site of cultural deposits". Now at last the ASI is seriously considering the acquisition of all private land on the site, which might well be the first step towards excavating the historical mound.

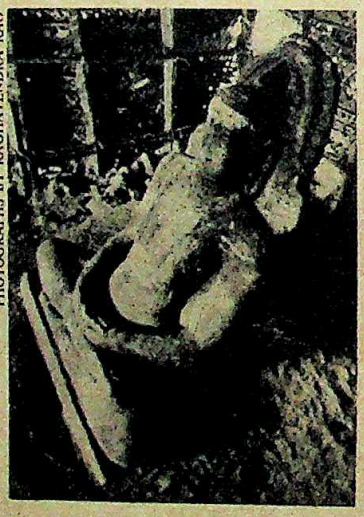
The ruins of Arikamedu were first mentioned by the Frenchman Le Gentil. Indologist Jouveau Dubreuil had managed to get together a fine collection of beads and gems from there in 1937. But it was really the British archaeologist Sir Mortimer Wheeler who first began, towards the end of the Second World War, a systematic process of digging up the site, taking care not to cause damage to any of the precious artifacts he unearthed.

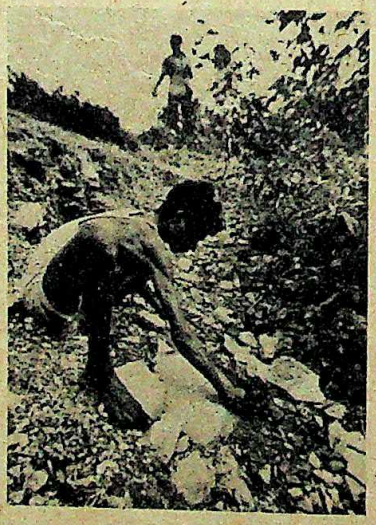
Cultural Treasure: And his find was rich: typically Roman, exquisite rouletted wares, dyeing vats used for the fabulous muslin of south India, amphoras with traces of wine in them, burial pots with a decipherable Roman stamp, besides hundreds of beads and semi-precious stones. But the excavations remained incomplete, with the war having drained Britain's finances, leaving little for such commercially unprofitable enterprises such as archaeology.

Right until 1982, Arikamedu was generally neglected after Wheeler's departure. While the ASI left the site strictly alone, private archaeological teams carried out an occasional exploration work or two, and local villagers helped themselves to the coins, beads and semi-precious stones that can be easily scraped out of the soil. Says Rajendran, a young farmhand: "On days I can't land any work, I try to spot any tourist willing to buy these beads and stones. I can make Rs 5-10 picking up such stuff every day." But matters came to a head in 1982 when some private owners of the Arikamedu land decided to level the land, and began bulldozing the place, destroying some immensely valuable urns in the process. The Government then stepped in and declared the area protected, under the Ancient Monuments and Sites Protection Act, 1958. But official action stopped right there with no further move to continue Wheeler's work.



Terracota heads found at Arikamedu





PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAGHAVENDRA RAO



(Clockwise from top left) A sixth century Buddha; villager digging for coins; brick wall dating back to the Roman era: ancient links

Financial Constraints: The ASI's attitude has attracted criticism. Says T.V.K. Rajan, amateur archaeologist and a journalist: "Considering the far-reaching historic and cultural potentialities of the site, ASI's lethargy is amazing." But ASI officials explain they have been helpless to do anything so far. Said a top official: "It is not as if we were sleeping so long on Arikamedu. It is only because of budgetary constraints that we have not been able to move in." The establishment recently of a National Council for the Coordination of Arts, Archaeology, Anthropology, Archives and Museums might, it is suggested, give a boost to archaeological exploration and excavation.

The obvious importance of the site cannot be ignored. Says Cyril Antony, archaeologist and curator of the Pondicherry State Museum: "Arikamedu is the oldest archaeological site of south India, to fix the beginnings of south Indian civilisation itself. Arikamedu's Indo-Roman culture marks the end of the archaeological period and the beginning of the historical period." There is actually a debate about how old the place is. Although Wheeler placed it around the first or second century B.C., Dr. Vimala Bagley traces it back to between second century B.C. and second century A.D. "The only way to settle the debate is to excavate," points out an ASI official.

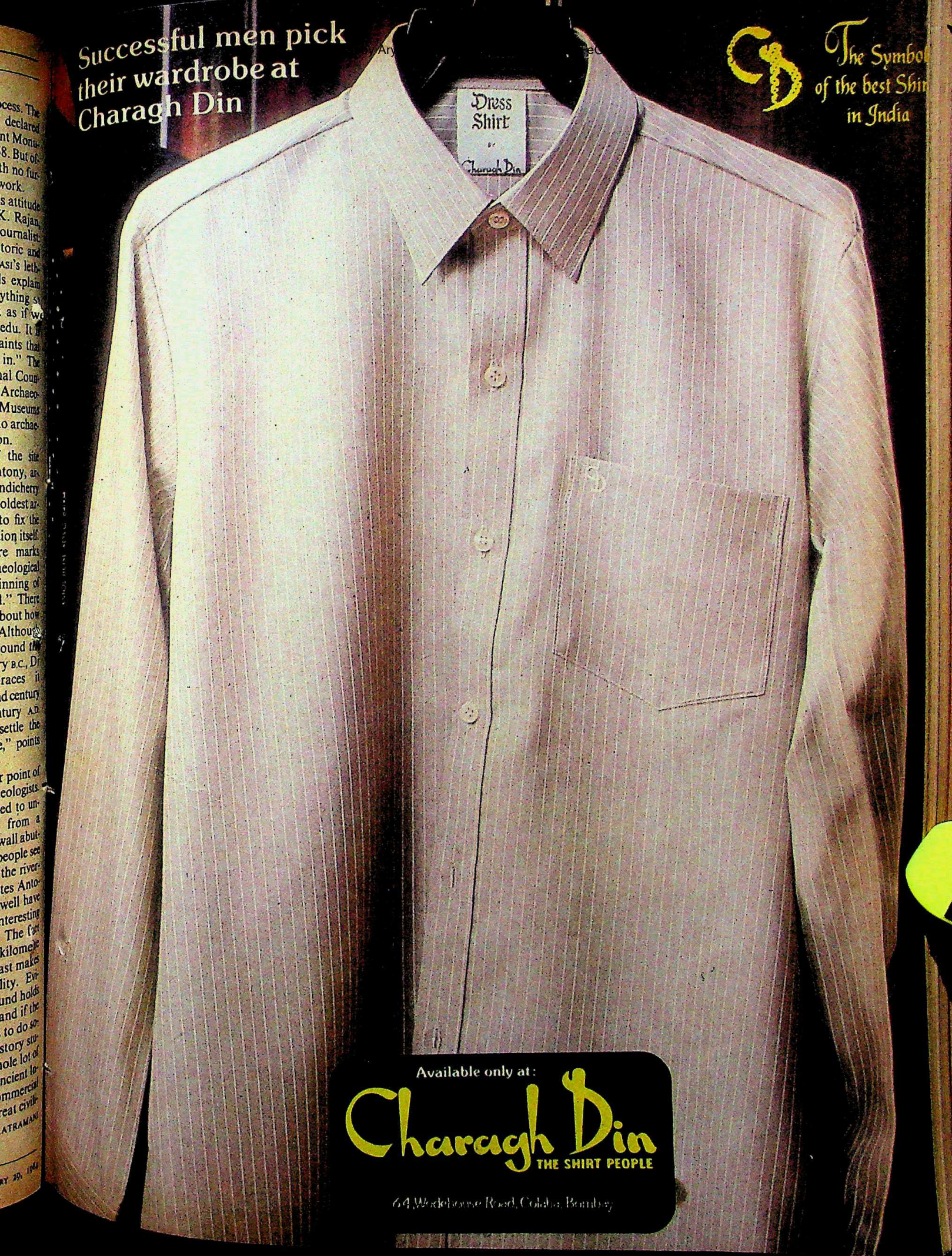
There is another point of interest to archaeologists. Wheeler had managed to unearth large bricks from a magnificent ancient wall abutting the river. Now people see a lot of potential in the riverbed as well. Speculates Antony: "The river may well have been the site of an interesting Roman shipwreck." The fact that the site is just a kilometre inland of the east coast makes for such a possibility. Evidently the hoary mound holds many more secrets, and if the Government decides to do something about it, history students might get a whole lot of interesting clues to ancient India's cultural and commercial links with another great civilisation.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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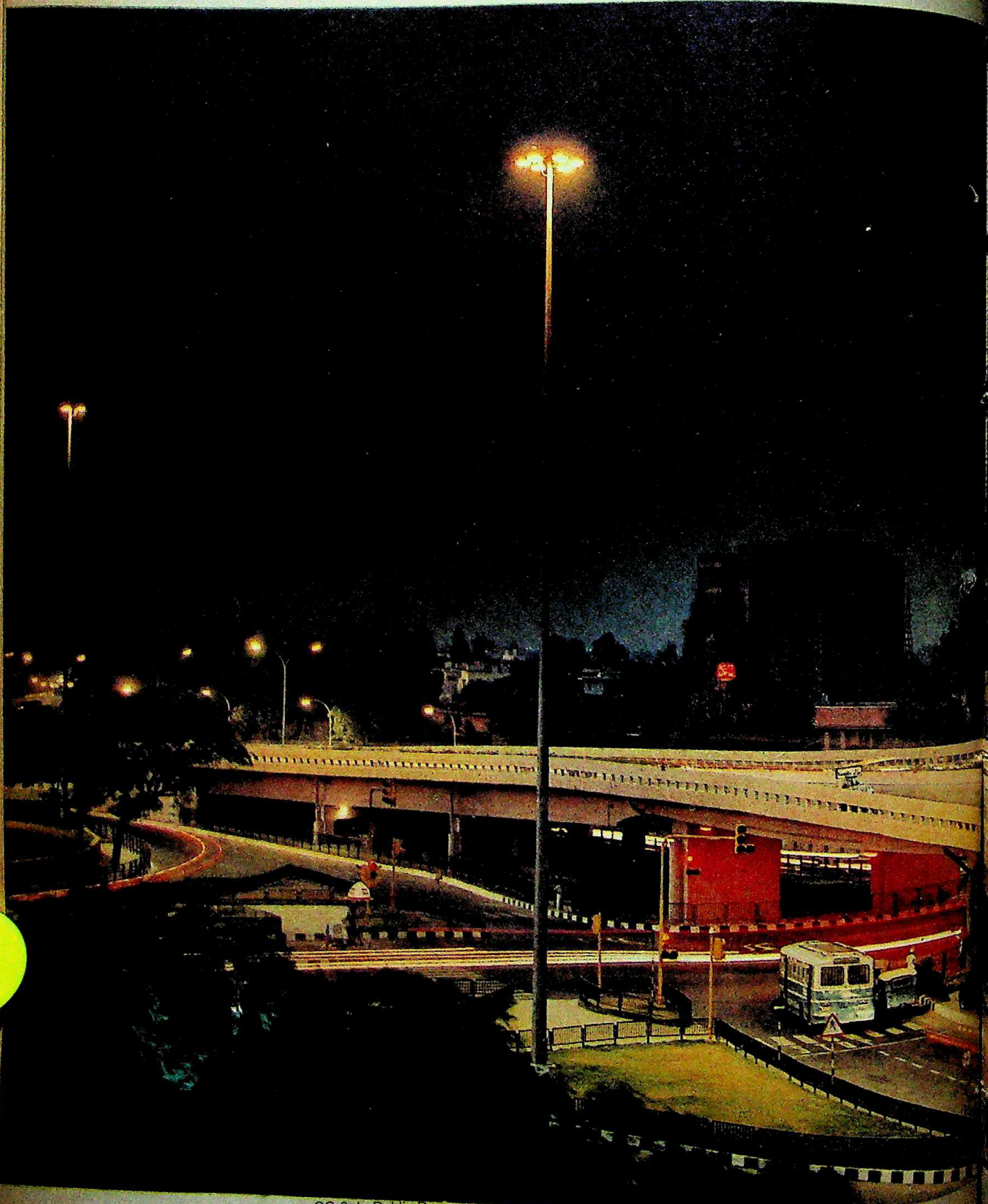
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SWEEPING CHANGES

THE GOVERNMENT is finalising its proposals for major and comprehensive changes to the Companies Act. These will make the Company Law Board vastly more powerful than it is at present, reduce the possibility of clandestine corporate takeovers, make it more difficult for companies to refuse share transfers, extend the period of "blank transactions" on the stock exchange, completely ban any further issue of non-redeemable preference shares, and so on. Many of the changes are a follow-up of the recommendations made by the Sachar Committee some years ago, while some of the changes are linked to amendments proposed to be made in the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act.

The full impact of the changes will be known only after a thorough study of all the proposed amendments, but informed sources in the Government say that the changes are designed to streamline corporate law in the light of the experience of the last couple of decades. However, some of the changes could also have a bearing on the share transfer imbroglio between Swraj Paul on the one hand and Escorts and DCM on the other.

INVESTMENT SPURT

FINANCIAL companies seem to be doing roaring business, with extraordinary rates of growth in their deposits over the last couple of years. The number of such companies (taking in a whole range of activities, from hire purchase to inter-corporate deposits and investment operations) reporting to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) rose 50 per cent in 1981-82, to around 3,000, and then doubled in 1982-83, to slightly over 6,000. Their deposits grew by a massive 31 per cent in 1981-82, against the growth of only 15.4 per cent in the deposits of the commercial banks, and then rose still further by 65 per cent last year to Rs 9,100 crore, while bank deposits grew by a pedestrian 17.8 per cent. RBI experts are mystified by this sudden spurt, although some of the growth may be purely statistical, caused by the fact that greater numbers of already existing companies have started reporting to the RBI.

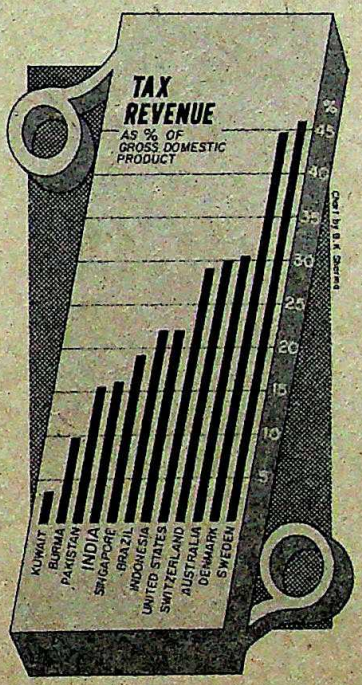
LEASING LIBERTIES

AFTER the excise fiddle of the last few years, when Rs 1,600 crore in tax revenue were kept back through court action on the definition of post-manufacturing expenses and other issues, the new trick to get past the taxman is leasing. Scores of companies have already entered the picture, and for many of them the real attraction in leasing comes from the tax benefits that can be reclaimed. Companies flush with funds can loan the money to a sister concern which is less profitable, and therefore virtually wipe out any tax liability by writing off depreciation and investment allowances on the leased-out machinery. Inevitably, leasing interest rates have dropped from 25 per cent a few months ago to around 21 per cent, while some firms offer as low as 15 per cent—lower than the banks' prime lending rate of 18 per cent, and therefore possible only with the help of tax breaks.

THE COOKING CONNECTION

THE SPURT in new connections for cooking gas (liquefied petroleum gas) has now led to an unprecedented rush for setting up manufacturing facilities that will turn out LPG cylinders. In one month alone towards the end of 1983, the Directorate-General of Technical Development registered no fewer than 66 proposals for manufacturing cylinders or accessories like LPG cylinder regulators and valves. The total number of proposals already registered now runs into the hundreds, with a total sanctioned capacity of over 30 million—which is more than six times the new connections presently envisaged.

TAX TRUTHS



CONTRARY to popular belief, India is not anywhere among the highest taxed nations in the world. If anything, taxes as a percentage of total domestic product are at the lower end of the international scale. Figures released recently by the International Monetary Fund show this percentage for India at a little over 16 per cent—compared to an average of 33.5 per cent for the industrialised countries and 20 per cent for the non-oil developing countries. Even the US has a tax ratio as high as 29.4 per cent, while in the case of Sweden the figure is 46 per cent. Only a handful of countries—Thailand (13.7 per cent), Romania (12.7 per cent), or oil-rich countries like Kuwait (3.8 per cent)—have a significantly lower tax to national income ratio.

HINDALCO'S BATTLE

FRESH chapters seem to be getting added to the continuing story of Hindustan Aluminium's (Hindalco) battle with the Government on aluminium pricing, which is controlled by the latter. The latest measure is Hindalco's unilateral decision to raise the prices of some of its products without waiting for the Government to make up its mind on the issue. Shortly before that, Hindalco had quietly backed out of its court battle regarding Rs 34 crore demanded from it by the Government as its contribution to the aluminium regulation account. This retreat was precipitated by the Government's threat to nationalise the company if it did not behave. Simultaneously, Hindalco paid the Government Rs 23 crore following a settlement which involved the Government backing down on some issues. In effect, however, the company has conceded very little because something approaching Rs 23 crore would have been payable as tax anyway if the company had held on to the full Rs 34 crore. The latest developments regarding a unilateral price hike follow the company's frustration at the Government's dithering over a formal increase in the price of aluminium.

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ECONOMIC PROGRESS

Running Out of Ideas



NOW THAT Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee has completed his round of meetings with the so-called experts drawn from industry, trade unions and the academia, he might do just one more thing before he gets down to the business of totting up his figures for the budget. I suggest he puts through a call to the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) and has a chat with its chief. The backroom boys of CSO do not talk much—at least not as much as the backroom boys of the Planning Commission—but their figures tell a tale that is sharply at variance with the stories put out by the Finance Ministry from time to time that one wonders whether it is the same economy they are talking about.

Planning Commission chief Shankarrao Chavan told the Parliamentary Consultative Committee the other day that the country's economy was in a "sound state" and "there was no crisis". Pranab Mukherjee has also been saying much the same thing. It depends, of course, on what you mean by crisis. If there is no crisis in Assam or Punjab, there is no economic crisis either. What you don't see doesn't hurt you, and you generally don't see what you do not wish to see.

What the Government refuses to see is that the economy has been virtually at a standstill, if not actually going downhill, for the past five years, which is a long time for anything to stay put. According to CSO's figures which are admittedly quick estimates but the only reliable and official figures you can go by, the average rate of growth of net national product, or national income in real terms has been 2.2 per cent per year between 1978-79 and 1982-83, which is nowhere near 5 per cent, a figure often trotted out by the Planning Commission as well as Pranab Mukherjee's ministry. National income stood at Rs 46,386 crore in 1978-79 (at 1970-71 prices) and Rs 50,486 crore in 1982-83, an increase of just Rs 4,000 crore in four years. Since during this period population has also gone up by 2.2 per cent per year, per capita incomes have not gone up at all and have remained frozen at 1978-79 levels.

Static Incomes: In 1978-79, the average income was Rs 716 per head (at 1970-71 prices) for every man, woman and child. In 1982-83, it was Rs 712, Rs 4 less than five years ago. In between, it has gone up and down, but it has never exceeded the level of 1978-79. Even in 1980-81, the first year of the present administration, when agricultural production had gone up substantially, and national income rose by 8 per cent, per capita income was only Rs 700. India must be one of the very few countries of the world whose incomes per head have stayed put over such a long period of time.

Despite the frenetic activity all round—loans from the IMF and World Bank, money pouring in from non-residents and the massive flow of technology from multinationals—all that we produce is worth no more than Rs 60 per head per month, and what is worse, we are producing less now than we did five years ago.

When we come to industry, the picture is no less gloomy. The income from manufacturing was Rs 10,019 crore in 1978-79 (also at 1970-71 prices). In 1982-83, it rose, if that is the right word, to Rs 10,804 crore, that is, by less than Rs 800 crore in all of five years. In per capita terms, and these are after all the terms that matter, industrial production was worth Rs 155 in 1978-79; five years later, it had declined to Rs 152. This is a good figure to remember, particularly by those who make much of our standing in the world as a leading industrial country.

> ***The economy is stuck and nothing that the Government does or intends doing has any effect on it.***

Our industrial output—the output of a country that is supposed to be among the top 15 or 20 countries in the world—is worth no more than Rs 13 per month per head, and it has been so for five long years, no matter how many new projects we have commissioned or how many dazzling international conferences we have held. We are stuck in the same old groove and we are going round and round the same old track. And if Shankarrao Chavan and his colleagues in the Planning Commission do not think that the situation is critical, they must be sadly out of touch with reality.

Steady Decrease: It is simply not true, as Mrs Gandhi and her spokesmen keep on saying, that the Government had to resort to the IMF loan because of the damaged economy her administration had inherited from Janata or from Charan Singh. Even after Charan Singh's disastrous tenure at the Finance Ministry, the country's foreign exchange reserves stood at Rs 5,164 crore at the end of 1979-80, and the trade deficit was only about Rs 2,500 crore. In fact, the Janata government added Rs 2,300 crore to the reserves in the course of the three years it was in power, nearly Rs 800 crore a year. Since then, they have been going down steadily and are now less than Rs 4,000 crore. The external debt burden has increased year by year—and so also the internal debt, but that is another story—and had gone up to Rs 17,580 crore by March 31, 1983. Five years ago, it was half that figure. However, while exports continue to stagnate, imports have more than doubled during the last five years from Rs 6,814 crore in 1978-79 to Rs 14,200 crore in 1982-83. We are, in fact, like the man on the bicycle who has to pedal furiously to be merely where he is and to keep falling off his perch. We are also borrowing right and left to pay off old loans and although we have decided to forgo the last instalment of the IMF loan, we are pressing for a loan of Rs 2,000 crore from the Asian Development Bank which we had joined on the understanding that we would not borrow from it.

The economy is stuck and nothing that the Government does or intends doing has any effect on it. National income is not going up, industrial production is moving at a snail's pace, and if any assets have been created—one reads about new projects every day, though most of them are on paper—with the huge chunks of money that we have borrowed, they do not seem to be yielding much by way of return.

Rising Prices: When you sink as much money into the economy as we have with nothing to show for it, the first thing to give is prices. After all, the cash must show up somewhere and it shows up firstly on price tags, and, secondly, in the parallel economy to which it has a ready entrée. Prices have gone up by more than 60 per cent over the last five years—the wholesale price index has shot up from 186 in 1978-79 to 320 last week, and consumer price index from 331 to 565—and, according to one estimate, black money now accounts for nearly 50 per cent of gross national product. This may not be a wholly reliable estimate—others put the figure at around 12 to 15 per cent—but there is no doubt that the percentage is on the increase. You have only to visit a five-star hotel to see that, for some people at least, money is not in short supply. Even politicians and their families now stay in five-star hotels something that was unheard of before Independence, when there were few five-star hotels anyway, or during the Nehru period. So while we have stagnation for the bulk of the people, more so for people who are outside the so-called organised sector, there is no dreamt of prosperity for the privileged few. Instead of growth with justice, we have neither growth nor justice, and things are slowly

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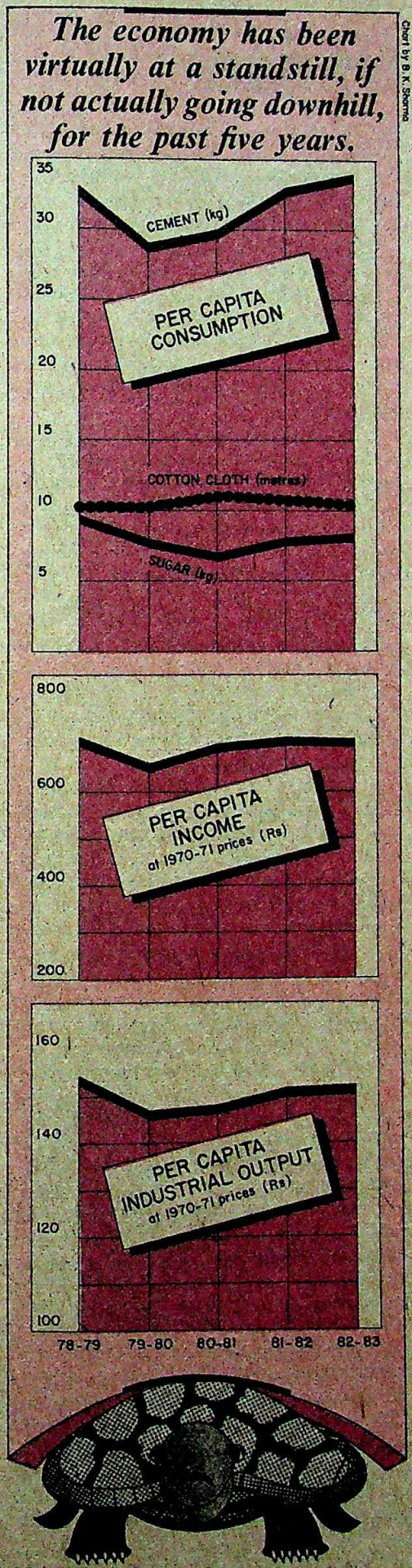
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beginning to fall apart. Economic activity is a social process and uneven economic activity leads to uneven social, often bordering on the antisocial, results.

If I were finance minister, I would think twice before accepting the Planning Commission's facile plea that the economy is in a sound state and there is no crisis. A static economy is almost by definition an unsound economy, for nothing else is static, neither population, nor the rising expectations of a better standard of living. My hunch is that we have persuaded ourselves too easily that because growth is related to investment, all that we have to do is to go on borrowing in the name of investing, even though the kind of system we have adopted seems totally ineffective and is unable to deliver the goods. For a country of our size and potential we just do not produce enough. Rs 13 worth of industrial output per man is no output for a country like India. It is no output for any country. It is also facile to think that another five-year plan will put things right. In fact, things may be far worse at the end of the next plan than they are now, unless we change radically the system that is neither fully capitalistic nor fully socialistic and falls so awkwardly between the two schools that we have neither growth, which capitalist systems are so good at delivering, nor a semblance of social justice or equality which socialist systems are supposed to yield.

Varying Budgets: Given the basic imbalance between investment and growth, I doubt whether the finance minister can do much with his budget. We have had, after all, five budgets in five years, and they have made no impact on the economy at all. We have had liberal budgets in which tax reliefs were given and taxes actually slashed, and tough budgets in which they were hiked. New excise levies have been imposed and old excise duties reduced or withdrawn. New import duties have been levied and free imports allowed. Non-residents have been given concession after concession, but all to no avail. What can Pranab Mukherjee do now that he has not tried before? After all, you can play the game only so many times. We seem to have tried everything; we have even tried handing out cash to the poor, no questions asked. But nothing seems to work, because the system itself has gone dead, and nothing can come out of it except further inflation and further wallops of black money.

Nor can a new plan, no matter how big, achieve much. Does one care, does anybody care about plans anymore, asked Ashok Mitra, the embattled finance minister of West Bengal, in an article that the poor editor of *Yojana* was too shocked to publish, but Mitra is right. A plan should be judged not by how much investment has gone into it but what results it produces. The Planning



Commission chief has made much of the fact that over 90 per cent of the resources would be met from internal resources, as if that was a big achievement in itself. The sixth plan was also to be financed through internal resources raised locally but half way through the plan, New Delhi had to rush to IMF for a massive loan and also for fairly large borrowings from banks and other sources. Most people suspect, and you cannot blame them, that the seventh plan will be no different from the sixth just as the sixth was no different from the fifth. Planning has become a bureaucratic exercise—just like annual budgets—and leave little mark on the economy, also like annual budgets.

Small Achievements: Everything in India has become marginal. The planners are happy to plan for marginal changes, a few per cent here and a few per cent there, as if this great country can go on waiting for ever for the bureaucrats to make up their mind. All that the new plans do is to extend last year's attitudes into next year's plans and so on. What the country now needs are quantum jumps that will make a profound qualitative impact on people's lives, not just a few people or a small section of people, but all people everywhere. It will not be possible to do this if we think we have done wonders by producing 142 million tonnes of foodgrains or 6 million tonnes of steel. In all of 25 years, we have not been able to even double our output of foodgrains—it was 82 million tonnes in 1960 and has not yet touched 150 million tonnes—or treble our steel production. Instead we pat ourselves on the back for increasing our oil production by 5 million tonnes—which is less than 7 kg per head—as if it was something of a record. Small minds not only think small but achieve small. Poor old Fritz Schumacher must be turning in his grave at the havoc his little book has wrought among the denizens of Yojana Bhavan. Schumacher was referring to machines, not men, but we have turned him on his head, as we always do when we borrow a good idea but don't know what to do with it.

What we need is new ideas, not merely new investment or new technology. We need new ideas to turn around the elephantine public sector that is always falling flat on its face, new ideas to make good use of the Rs 60,000 crore worth of deposits in the bank without fuelling inflation, new ideas to utilise funds from Indians abroad, and above all new ideas to snatch planning out of the clutches of bureaucrats, who are always happy pushing files, adding a note here and another minute there, but making sure at the same time that nothing really changes. Development means change and a system that abhors change can hardly cope with the problems that development always brings in its wake.

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INDUSTRY

Cautious Optimism

AS TENSION builds up to what could be a crucial Central budget, Indian industry is caught on a tricky slope: a good budget could help convert a growing optimism about the short-term future into a quick run up the growth curve; but a bad blow from the finance minister could just as easily push industry back into the trough from which it is now emerging hesitantly.

The business mood is mildly hopeful. Till last September, the industrial pace was sluggish. October saw a sudden spurt in the production index. And official economists say the picture has improved further since then. The full year could now see a growth in output of over 5 per cent, better than either of the two previous years; and the almost uniform opinion seems to be that the coming year will be still better.

But there are several ifs, because over and above the hard evidence of increasing demand and production, the upbeat mood is also founded on what could be ephemeral expectations: that though the bumper crop has not yet led to a spurt in demand, it will do so soon; that after two years of major and protracted disputes, workers will now be less inclined to force closures because, speaking simply, they have no energy left; and that the Government, caught in a pre-election year, will hesitate to come down hard in the budget on either consumer goods or personal incomes.

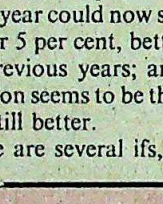
Mixed Reaction: Inevitably in such a period of transition from a moderately recessionary period to more hopeful times, the feedback from businessmen is still mixed. Most are upbeat in their assessments of what lies ahead, but others still see only the problems in the way. The Association of Indian Engineering Industry's (AIEI) half-yearly survey of business opinion brings this out quite sharply: throughout 1982, those who expected business fortunes to decline outnumbered the optimists. By early 1983, this had begun to change, but opinion was still almost equally divided between the optimists and pessimists.

Not any more. By the closing months of 1983, the optimists were clearly in the majority: 37 per cent expected an uptrend ahead, while only 22 per cent foresaw a decline in industrial fortunes. This is still well below the sweeping optimism of early 1981 (*see chart*), when more than half the companies expected their business situation to improve while barely 10 per cent expected a decline. Nevertheless, the curve of optimism is now rising. Says Subhash Dandekar, managing director of Camlin and president of the Small and Developing Industries Association of India: "The last two years had seen a major setback in demand. But the last three to four months have shown some improvement. Things are not yet back to the pre-slump level, but there are improvements."

Adds Gurpreet Singh, vice-president of AIEI: "I sense a clear feeling of optimism about the coming year. Things are beginning to look up." That sentiment is echoed by M.K. Mohta, president of the All-India Manufacturers Organisation (AIMO): "Some of the economic indicators are still mixed, but businessmen seem optimistic about the future. Almost every big business house has major plans for expansion. This is a very healthy sign."

Other business organisations sense the uptrend too. M.L. Nandrajog, secretary-general of the Punjab, Haryana and Delhi Chamber of Commerce and Industry, feels that "the mood this time last year was subdued. Now the outlook is certainly better."

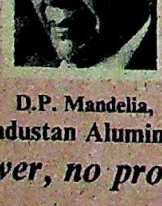
Consumer Boom: These statements, reflecting a reversal of industrial fortunes do not mean that all is well—too many are still in trouble to warrant such an assumption. But there is little doubt that numerous industries are now doing better than before. Soda ash, viscose staple fibre and polyester filament yarn—all victims during 1982 and early 1983 of a liberalised import regime—have registered substantial growth rates in the first seven months of this fiscal year, ranging from 29 to 160 per cent. Other industries that had been hit by the unprecedented credit squeeze of 1982, like tractors, are now chugging away merrily—tractor production rose 8.4 per cent in 1983, and is expected to change into higher gear soon. And though numerous comsumer products continue to be in the doldrums (textiles, synthetic detergents and cigarettes are obvious examples), consumer durables have been an area of conspicuous consumption: refrigerator sales



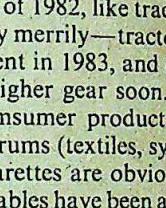
M.K. Mohta,
president, AIMO:
Indicators are still mixed



D.P. Mandelia,
Hindustan Aluminium:
No power, no production



Gurpreet Singh,
vice-president, AIEI:
I sense a feeling of optimism



K.K. Bajoria,
president, IJMA:
Pick-up but for the strike



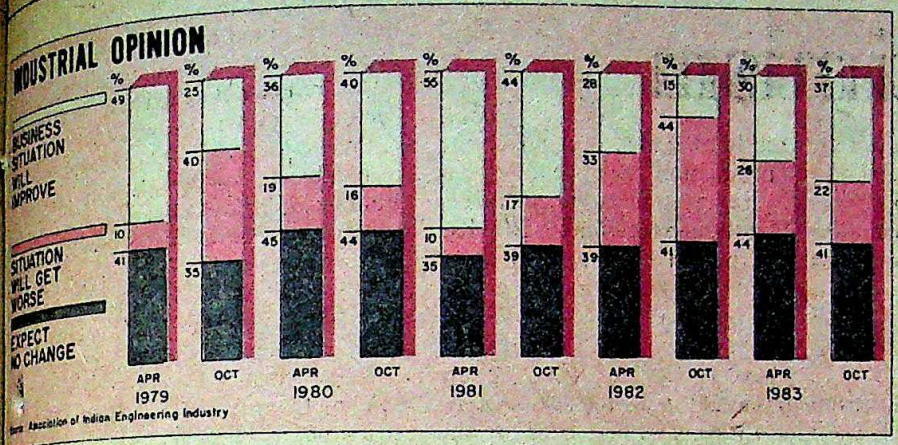
Subhash Dandekar,
Camlin:
Things are improving



Deepak Navnitlal,
vice-president, ATMA:
The worst textile crisis

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rose 32 per cent in April-October and then spurted by 58 per cent in November-December; and the production of mopeds, scooters and motorcycles was up by between 23 and 36 per cent. Even some of the industries worst hit in recent years may pull through—shipping, for instance. S.P. Mandelia who looks after Century Shipping's shipping division, says: "I expect a shipping recovery by 1985."

The problem sectors cannot, however, be wished away. Textiles continue to be most seriously affected; and Deepak Navnitlal, vice-president of the Ahmedabad Textiles Mills Association (ATMA), says: "The textile industry is passing through the worst crisis since its inception." That sentiment is echoed by Bombay's leading textile magnate Motilal Piramal. Says he: "Demand is very slack, and there is too much idle capacity in the industry."

Some other troubled industries are not doing much better. Paper production is down 11 per cent, nylon tyre cord by 10 per cent, both steel and aluminium by 8 per cent. Officials in the Steel Ministry in Delhi report the startling finding that total steel demand has shrunk in absolute terms by 11 per cent in the last three years. And D.P. Mandelia, who looks after Hindustan Aluminium as well as other Birla units like Gwalior Rayon, argues that the problem increasingly is lack of power. Mandelia points out that the power cut for industry is 40 per cent in Kerala, 70 per cent in Karnataka, 100 per cent in Rajasthan, 50 to 60 per cent in Haryana. "Whichever state you look at, the power situation is bad and getting worse. How can you have production without power?"

The complaints about power, and more crucial key problems with coal and transport, are, however, significant because this is in itself something of a new tune. A year ago, the complaint was lack of demand, while railway wagons went abegging for want of cargo, and coal piled up at pitheads. Today, to the extent that the complaint is less about demand and more about infrastructure, it is indicative of the fact that industry is gaining steam once again. Says D.H. Pai Panandikar, secretary-general of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI): "So far the constraint was lack of demand. From now on it will be inputs like power and coal."

Unprecedented Blow: If there is still a problem of demand, it is primarily confined to the government sector. Both at the Centre and in the states, governments seem to have become increasingly impecunious. The Rs 1,200 crore cutback in central spending announced a month ago has meant, for instance, that the railways will place fewer orders for railway wagons. Says A.K. Sinha of Texmaco, which manufactures wagons: "This has come as a crippling blow to companies like ours. All that I can say is that the year ahead will be gloomy." Wagon production, countrywide, is now expected to drop 29 per cent next year.

Similarly, the absence of state government spending on road transport of electricity (because both road transport corporations and the electricity boards are losing heavily) has had serious downstream effects. Commercial vehicle production dropped 3.2 per cent in 1983, the statistic being made gloomier by the fact that 1982 itself was a depressed year.

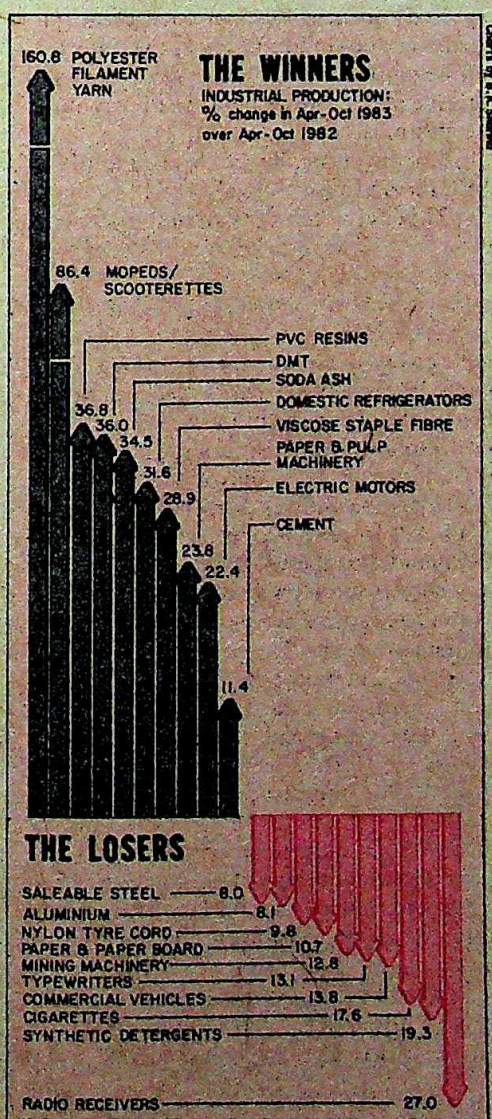
The Centre's inability to provide sufficient investment outlays for new steel projects, for instance, has had similar downstream effects. T.C. Basu of the Calcutta-based Burn Standard Company, which supplies steel plant equipment, says: "There is no steel plant coming up after the one at Vishakhapatnam, so there has been a gradual reduction in capital goods orders. The future is uncertain, and I really do not know what will happen."

For many companies the coming budget is going to be crucial. Nandrajog points out that the reduction of excise duties in October on items like refrigerators led to a sharp spurt in demand. "Both the Government's and industry's objectives were served. The manufacturers were able to increase their sales, while the Government has not lost excise revenue because of the higher volume of sales. The Government should now extend the logic of this decision to other areas also." Pai Panandikar of FICCI also argues for a "selective reduction in excise duties" in order to stimulate demand.

There are yet others, however, who now view the world in a rosy tint. A spokesman of the public sector Hindustan Machine Tools, for instance, said in Bangalore: "The market for machine tools is fine, just fine." And Vinay Rai, who heads Usha Microprocess Controls, says the sales of his and others' computers are growing rapidly. Even in a usually troubled sector like jute, Indian Jute Mills Association (IJMA) President K.K. Bajoria says: "Demand had been picking up, and this would have been a good year if it were not for the strike that we now have."

Clearly, though there are problems facing all too many industrial sectors, the general business expectation just before the budget is that things are getting better. And if the budget does the right thing for industry, there could be still better times ahead.

—T.N. NINAN with bureau reports



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Indian Oxygen Limited

A member of The BOC Group

Chairman's Statement



RUSSI MODY

The following is the Statement made by Mr Russi Mody, Chairman, Indian Oxygen Limited, at the Forty-ninth Annual General Meeting of the Company held on 8 February 1984.

The Directors' Report and the Managing Director's Review of operations together with the Accounts for the year 1982/83 have given you all the relevant information about the Company and its working and I do not have much to add.

Against the background of the difficult time through which the industry is passing, the performance of your Company during the year can be considered fairly satisfactory. The marginal drop in post-tax profit compared to last year is adequate to maintain the same rate of dividend without scaling down retention but this drop indicates a trend which has to be carefully watched. The fortunes of your Company are tied up with the performance of other industries. Most of them suffered serious setbacks last year as a result of acute power shortage and general depression in the economy. I would like to believe that the present demand recession will soon be over but there appears to be no perceptible sign so far.

Throughout the world during the current recession manpower has been pruned drastically and uneconomic units have been closed down. In India we have to view economic decisions from social considerations. Unemployment is a major problem of our country. We cannot, unless compelled to, take a decision to close down an unviable unit or reduce manpower significantly, however economically justified those decisions may be. But we cannot ignore the fact that a nation's prosperity lies in production and productivity. Because of under-utilisation of capacities and generally low labour productivity, ours is a high cost economy. If we can optimise the use of all our productive resources, we can bring down our costs drastically and that would give a tremendous boost to the economy. Indeed, we cannot indefinitely continue the colossal waste of national wealth by under-utilisation of installed plant capacities. The sooner we come to grips with this problem the better it will be for the country and our people.

After successfully staging the Asiad in 1982 we hosted NAM and CHOGM in 1983. We have once again earned the respect of the world not only as a nation but as people who can organise and manage things well. Indian managers are in good demand abroad and they are amongst the very best in the world. All these notwithstanding we seem to be unable to achieve the level of efficiency which is required to manage our own affairs. The public sector has reached the commanding heights of the economy. Now it is necessary for it to reach the same commanding heights of efficiency. In the private sector we tend to take shelter under infrastructural deficiencies for our lack of efficiency. From the Prime Minister downwards everybody is aware of the urgency for all sectors — private and public — to perform efficiently. What, however, is needed is the capacity to translate this wish into action.

A country's foreign exchange reserve is an important indicator of its economic health and our Government is to be

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congratulated for placing the appropriate emphasis on this aspect and urging all of us to augment export. However, I know of many instances where schemes aimed at earning or saving considerable amounts of foreign exchange have floundered at the doors of those who place emphasis on false ideology and have ill-conceived notions about the country's interest.

Last year I referred to some of the policy liberalisations announced by the Government to achieve faster industrial growth. Unfortunately, in implementation of the policy the same emphasis on speed or growth is not evident. Several proposals submitted by the Company to translate into action the Government policy for the adoption of advanced technology and introduction of economies of scale have not been cleared yet, although some of them have been lying with the Government for 18 months or more. The most disturbing feature of the process of scrutiny of these proposals is that the views expressed by those who desire to shut out technological advancement and growth to preserve and further their own interests are given heavy weightage without proper evaluation of the long-term detriment that these views could cause to national interest. The other problem is the feeling of apprehension with which proposals for the introduction of advanced technology and new product applications are viewed. Unless the administration of the policy is done with the same visionary outlook with which the policies are framed, the policies by themselves will achieve very little.

The project proposals presently under the consideration of the Government aim at introducing to this country the technological breakthrough achieved in the field of application of industrial gases to a number of nationally useful purposes like energy conservation, food preservation and transportation, environmental control etc. Work in the Company's new R&D Centre for the adaptation of these advanced technologies to Indian conditions has made good progress. I sincerely hope that these proposals will be approved without much delay.

The achievement of a company is indeed the achievement of the men associated with its activities at all levels. Our managers and employees have done a good job in an extremely difficult year. I take this opportunity to thank and congratulate all of them.

Calcutta
8 February 1984

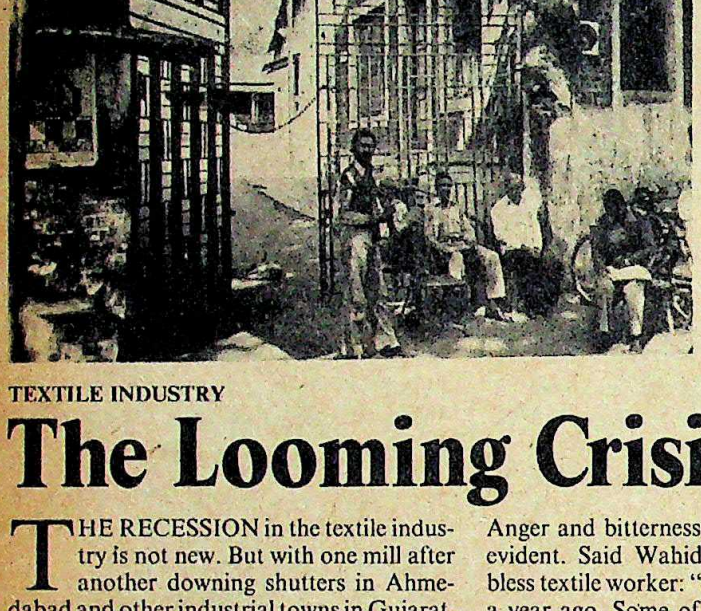
Note : *This does not purport to be a record of the proceedings of the meeting.*

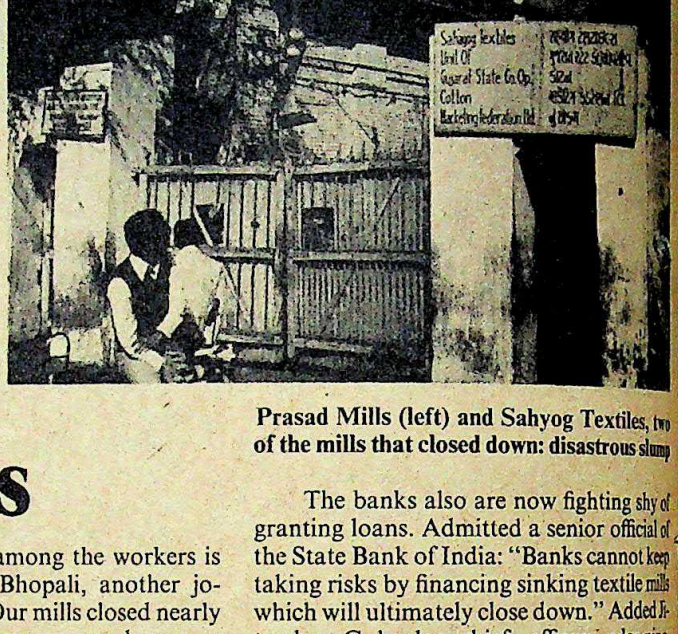
HIGHLIGHTS OF PERFORMANCE

	Year ended 30 September 1983	Year ended 30 September 1982
	Rs lakhs	Rs lakhs
Sales	9635	9149
Profit before taxation	1069	1230
Provision for taxation	555	695
Profit after taxation	514	535
Dividend distribution	219	219
Earnings per share	Rs 4.70	Rs 4.89
Dividend per share	Rs 2.00	Rs 2.00

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R. RAJAGOPAL



R. RAJA GOPAL

Prasad Mills (left) and Sahyog Textiles, two of the mills that closed down: disastrous slump

TEXTILE INDUSTRY

The Looming Crisis

THE RECESSION in the textile industry is not new. But with one mill after another downing shutters in Ahmedabad and other industrial towns in Gujarat, the problem reached crisis proportions last fortnight. Six mills had closed down in the last one and a half years. Eight more were added to this in the last two months, and now many others are rapidly shifting to a five-day week.

Paranoid industry sources maintain that another dozen mills are in the red and will almost certainly close if steps are not taken to give them immediate help. Out of the 51 mills still running in the state 18 have resorted to a five-day week. Over 25,000 workers have already been rendered jobless, out of which 20,000 are in Ahmedabad alone. Another 15,000, who are also jobless, used to work as temporary hands.

In the last two months, Prasad Mills, Sahyog Textiles and Aryodaya Spinning and Weaving Mills closed down in Ahmedabad, while Navjyot Mills in nearby Kadi, Narmada Spinning Mills in Broach and Yamuna Mills in Baroda followed suit. The Navjivan Mills and the Gaikwad Mills have not declared an official closure, but are no longer functioning. Warned Ashok Bhatt, BJP MLA and trade unionist: "Traditionally, Ahmedabad textile workers are very sober. But they have reached the limit of their endurance. If the Government does not reopen the mills, it will be disastrous."

Sorry State: The plight of the worker is epitomised by the refrain of Sharafat Hussein, 50, a jobless textile worker: "For the last few months, I managed to support seven of my family members with my savings and the little money my son got from odd tailoring jobs. But I cannot pull on any longer." Anger and bitterness among the workers is evident. Said Wahid Bhopali, another jobless textile worker: "Our mills closed nearly a year ago. Some of us saw our dear ones dying as we had no money for medical care. Half a dozen suicides have taken place among the workers. How long will this suffering go on?"

The textile crisis which started two years ago shows no signs of improving, and has in fact got steadily worse. The fall in consumer demand because of lack of money, the shifting of spending priorities to consumer goods like household appliances and luxury goods like television sets, the spurt in demand for longer-lasting synthetics, stiff competition from mushrooming powerlooms and in-house problems relating to obsolete textile machinery have combined to bring about a situation in which the industry is today precariously balanced at the edge of a precipice.

Mill managements also fret about stocks piling up. The Ahmedabad Textile Mills Association which picked up 23 mills for a sample survey, found that stockpiling was increasing: in June last year, these mills had 48,464 bales of cloth of 1,500 metres each. In November, this rose to 73,464 bales, and by December the figure was up by another 15 per cent.

Scarce Credit: To make matters worse, fear stalks the Ahmedabad markets. Merchants refuse to sell cotton and other materials to textile mills on credit. All transactions with sick mills are in cash. This started with the Government axe falling on 13 textile mills in Bombay, which were nationalised last October. Merchants who had outstanding credit with mills are reported to have lost about Rs 60 crore as a result.

The banks also are now fighting shy of granting loans. Admitted a senior official of the State Bank of India: "Banks cannot keep taking risks by financing sinking textile mills which will ultimately close down." Added Jitendra Golwala, chief officer, planning, Bank of India: "Nationalised banks are ready to grant loans to textile mills as it is a part of their social philosophy to help shaky units. But we now have to be on guard as far as the textile industry is concerned, and can help only those units which can become financially viable."

Powerlooms have been responsible to a great extent in paralysing the textile industry (INDIA TODAY, November 15, 1983). While there were only around 3.29 lakh powerlooms in towns like Ahmedabad, Surat, Bhiwandi, Bombay and Ichalkaranji in 1977, the number now is over 7 lakh. Industrial circles put the number of unofficial powerlooms at an additional 4 lakh.

In Ahmedabad and Bombay, powerloom cloth manufacture is mainly dominated by cloth merchants, traders and wholesalers. They got into the business in the last three or four years as they felt the pulse of the market and visualised the scene in the years ahead. Wholesalers are now manufacturing cloth in their powerloom units and then marketing it. According to market sources, about 40 per cent of the wholesalers have reduced their buying quotas from textile mills as they are now engaged in marketing their own powerloom cloth. Says J.P. Shah, a powerloom cloth manufacturer: "Over 60 per cent of the mills will have to close down by 1990 as the decentralised powerloom sector will capture the cloth market."

Domestic Slump: Rising costs have also served to drive mill owners to the wall. In the last two years, fixed costs have risen by about 26 per cent and variable costs by about 13 per

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cent. But the prices of cloth have increased by only 8.5 per cent. Says Praful Anubhai, managing director, Rustom Mills: "We have been able to absorb the fall in profits till now, but not any more." To a certain extent, the large-scale smuggling in of synthetics has also contributed to a slump in the home market. According to rough estimates, about 20 to 30 million metres of synthetics are clandestinely brought into the country every year. Further about 1.5 million Indians who go abroad as tourists every year are estimated to be bringing in readymade garments which use 60 million metres of cloth.

If Gujarat's mills are to survive, they must modernise. But as profits plummet money to modernise is not available. Those like Calico and DCM who had the foresight to diversify, shrewdly moved into fields like engineering machinery, chemicals, electronics, plastics and even caustic soda and detergents. Today, these mills manage to survive as they are financially supported by other units. Even the companies which invested in modernisation of their textile units a decade ago are today continuing to reap profits as the powerloom sector has not been able to compete against their superior quality. The others who booked profits without caring to invest some of the money in modernisation are today paying a heavy price.

Unprofitable Giants: Matters have reached a stage where the survival of composite mills (combining the functions of spinning, weaving and processing under one roof) is in doubt. Cotton mills are incurring huge losses essentially because the weaving units have become a costly proposition. The spinning units, in comparison, continue to do reasonably well. In fact, some of the mill managements told their workers last fortnight that the mills could be reopened if the weaving units were closed down.

The Majoor Mahajan, which has a membership of nearly 1.4 lakh in Ahmedabad, has turned down the proposal as it would throw thousands of workers out of employment. Said President Arvind Buch: "We are not against mills closing down if they cannot run any more. But then the managements will have to give adequate compensation to the workers." Buch agrees that the situation is hopeless, but argues that the only way is for the Government to nationalise the industry. Considering the fact that the Government has yet to restart some of the 13 mills nationalised in Bombay, and with the National Textile Corporation notching up losses year after year, this may be no solution at all.

Against this depressing backdrop militant Bombay trade union leader Datta Samant arrived in Ahmedabad last fortnight. Addressing meetings in labour localities, he too demanded the nationalisation of the industry, and called for the setting up of a committee to examine accounts of all mills in the last 10 years to find out how funds had been fraudulently diverted by mill managements. Samant drew crowds wherever he went, but it was clear that textile labourers in Ahmedabad would not join his bandwagon. Pointed out Gopinath Rupnath, a textile worker: "The workers here are intelligent. We will never join him. Let him first rescue all the workers who lost jobs because of the textile strike in Bombay." That attitude shows sound common sense, but if Ahmedabad's textile mills are to survive, something more is called for.

—RAMESH MENON

DAITARI

Stillborn

RARELY is a project's epitaph written before its foundation-stone is laid. The 3 million tonnes steel project at Daitari in Orissa, once heralded as the centre-piece of the J.B. Patnaik ministry's ambitious industrialisation programme now runs the risk of meeting this ignominious fate.

Speaking at Dhenkanal last month in the presence of AICC(I) General Secretary Rajiv Gandhi, Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee declared that Orissa was now dotted with a number of upcoming large and medium industries, and if this one did not come up the people should not mind.

There are no more than 86 people now at the site and this year's budget for the gigantic project is a miserly Rs 1 crore. The new technology is not yet fully developed.

The state Government seemed to have got the message earlier: publicity brochures had been highlighting this "gift" to the people of Orissa but have for the last six months been conspicuously silent on the subject. And a state government official said that Chief Minister Patnaik was "tired of pleading with the Centre" to clear the project.

Uncertain Future: The project, estimated to cost over Rs 3,000 crore, was as a matter of fact cleared three years ago and a technology-finance deal struck with a British consortium led by Davy Mckee, which was to set up the plant in three years. But subsequent differences over the contract led, in May 1982, to a cancelling of the deal—and since then the project has hung in limbo.

Steel Ministry officials in Delhi are chary of admitting that the project is as good as shelved. And K.K. Mishra, chief executive of the Neelachal Ispat Nigam (NIN)—the company formed to set up and run the steel plant—prefers to talk of the groundwork that continues to be done: surveys are on, he says, to test iron ore, dolomite, limestone, manganese and other raw materials required by the plant, and soil testing is on to estimate the quantity of excavation work required. Steel Secretary Lavraj Kumar adds that coal and iron ore samples have been despatched to West Germany for testing a new steel-making process that has been developed there. Also, the public sector Metallurgical and Engineering Consultants India Ltd (MECON) is preparing a detailed project report for Daitari.

But all this suggests little more than holding action. There are no more than 86 people now at the project site, this year's budget for the gigantic project is a miserly Rs 1 crore, and next year will yield no more than Rs 2 crore. While the money required for serious project work is nowhere in sight, the new technology being considered for the project is in fact not yet fully developed: only pilot plants of around 60,000 tonnes have been put into operation in Germany, and scaling this up to 6 lakh tonnes (the minimum initial size for Daitari) is some way off.

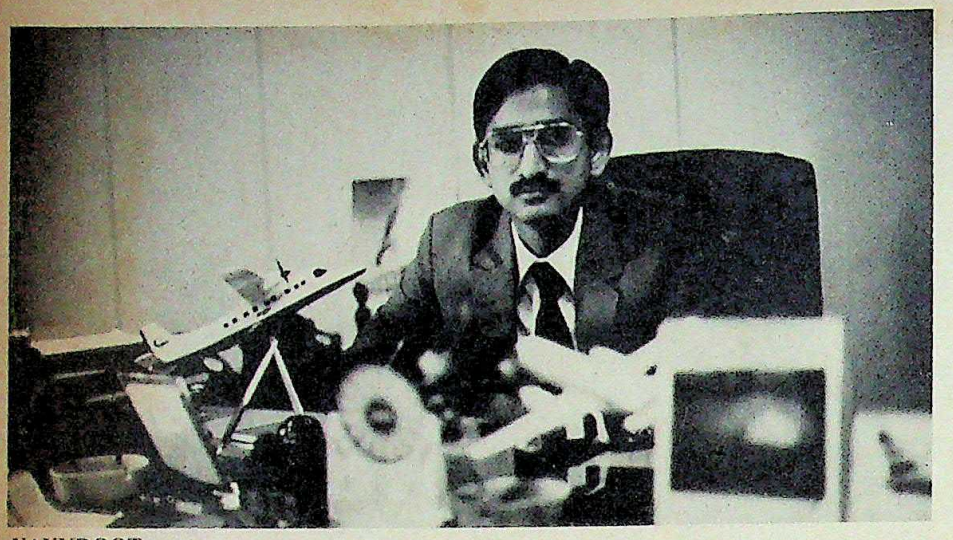
Awaiting Signal: Elsewhere too, the steel expansion programme is in the doldrums. By the end of the sixth plan, in March next year, 4.15 million tonnes of additional steel capacity should have been added in phases. As things have turned out, virtually none of this will be available till the first or second year of the seventh plan. Daitari's twin project at Vishakhapatnam, whose first stage was scheduled for completion next year, is limping along with paltry budgetary allocations, while yet another greenfield project, at Vijaynagar in Karnataka, waits in limbo for the green signal.

The project's bleak future also spells trouble for Orissa's under-used iron ore mines. With exports to Japan and other countries becoming a problem, no fewer than 35 mines closed down last month, throwing over 5,000 workers out of employment. In fact, the state-owned Orissa Mining Corporation (OMC) has developed a mine right in Daitari, at a cost of Rs 20 crore, but not a tonne has been despatched for export. The nearby Paradip Port too is languishing as a result, and OMC Executive Director N.C. Das argues that if the Daitari steel plant did get under way, most of these downstream problems would automatically get solved. "But right now, we are in terrible shape."

—FARZAND AHMED in Bhubaneswar

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Harsh Vardhan: cautious optimism

VAYUDOOT

Happy Landings

DOES a profit of Rs 1,000 in one month spell success for a set-up with a yearly turnover of Rs 4 crore? Not really. But for Vayudoot, the perennial lame duck of Indian skies, it was something to cheer about. Last month, India's third carrier finally looked as if it had shaken the red ink off its wings when figures showed marginal monthly profits for four successive months starting September 1983. In addition, revenue in the first nine months of the financial year increased by 42 per cent over the previous year while the expenditure increase for the same period was less than 1 per cent. No wonder that the 28-year old whiz-kid General Manager Harsh Vardhan cautiously says: "I think we have turned the corner."

Black ink is not all. Sometime this year, the Vayudoot symbol will be emblazoned on three brand-new Dornier 228 aircraft, welcome additions to the current fleet of three Avros and two Fokkers leased from Indian Airlines and one Dornier on wet lease from Druk Air of Bhutan. The airline presently services 17 stations ranging from Dehra Dun to Kandla with 10 flights; it plans to add nearly 20 more stations to its network this very year and the Dorniers will be the lynchpin of the expansion programme and for good reason.

For one, they are considerably more fuel-efficient than the ageing Fokkers and Avros. For another, it is easier to break even on the 19-seater Dornier than the 44-seater Fokker or 48-seater Avro: studies show that if Vayudoot operates a Dornier six hours a day it needs 14 passengers on a flight to break even; a Fokker or an Avro would have to carry about 25 passengers per flight to get out of the red.

Streamlined Functioning: The new enthusiasm at Vayudoot marks a refreshing change from the days when it was run so badly that the second year saw it almost submerged in the red with losses of Rs 1.6 crore, nearly 12 times the figure of the first year. Vayudoot officials say that the reason why the airline is beginning to look as if it will finally make it is that working has been streamlined to a great extent. For instance, 94 per cent of the flights take off and land on schedule, an achievement that is very close to that of Indian Airlines, and which has helped towards a higher load factor of 61 per cent, up from 44 per cent in 1982-83. Another factor is the greater sense of involvement which stems from the fact that Vayudoot's own crews now operate the aircraft in place of Indian Airlines crews.

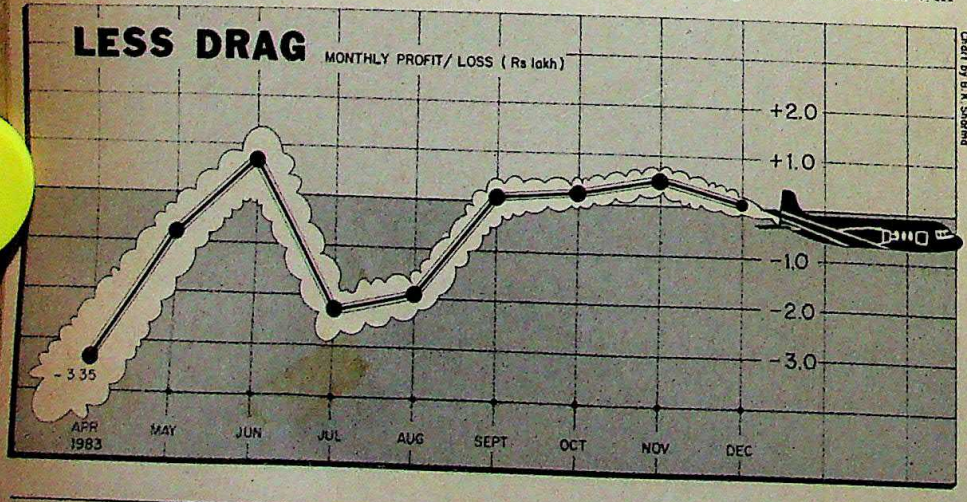
A major reason for the improvement is that unprofitable flights have been scrapped and high-yield ones added. Those wiped off the timetable include lengthy hopper flights, like a series of services beginning and ending in Calcutta that wandered through four towns. The management has obviously found that 'quickies' such as the Delhi-Dehra Dun-Delhi run are healthier; this particular flight, in fact, notched up an overall load factor of 80 per cent and there are plans to introduce an afternoon flight. The four most profitable flights are all there-and-back hops: three starting from Delhi and servicing Ludhiana, Dehra Dun and Kulu, and one linking Bombay and Kandla.

Ambitious Projects: But as Vayudoot's young general manager says: "Showing a profit once a year is not enough. We must sustain it." The airline is planning to operate as what one executive calls "an intra-regional carrier", with emphasis on services such as special charters for tourists, wedding groups and business executives. In addition, the airline has cobbled together two package tour programmes to the hill resorts of Mussoorie and Kulu-Manali. The packages are aimed at middle class travellers and include luxury hotel accommodation and sightseeing. Another plan is to organise group tours for pilgrims, which the management hopes will evoke a fair response in a country dotted with shrines.

Vayudoot officials expect with the help of these and other measures to wipe out losses and make a profit of Rs 10,000 by the end of the current year. "There is still a lot to be done," says Vardhan. "We have to establish the basic infrastructural facilities to ensure that our aircraft operate from a sound base. Profit is not everything. We must plan for growth. The important thing is to provide the basic services to the people."

The airline plans to buy 10 more aircraft in the next three years—a total investment of about Rs 25 crore. This is by any yardstick a major investment and, clearly, substantial profits are needed to justify it. And that is why, despite the heartening progress in the last few months, everybody at Vayudoot is keeping their fingers firmly crossed.

—JAGANNATH DURASHI



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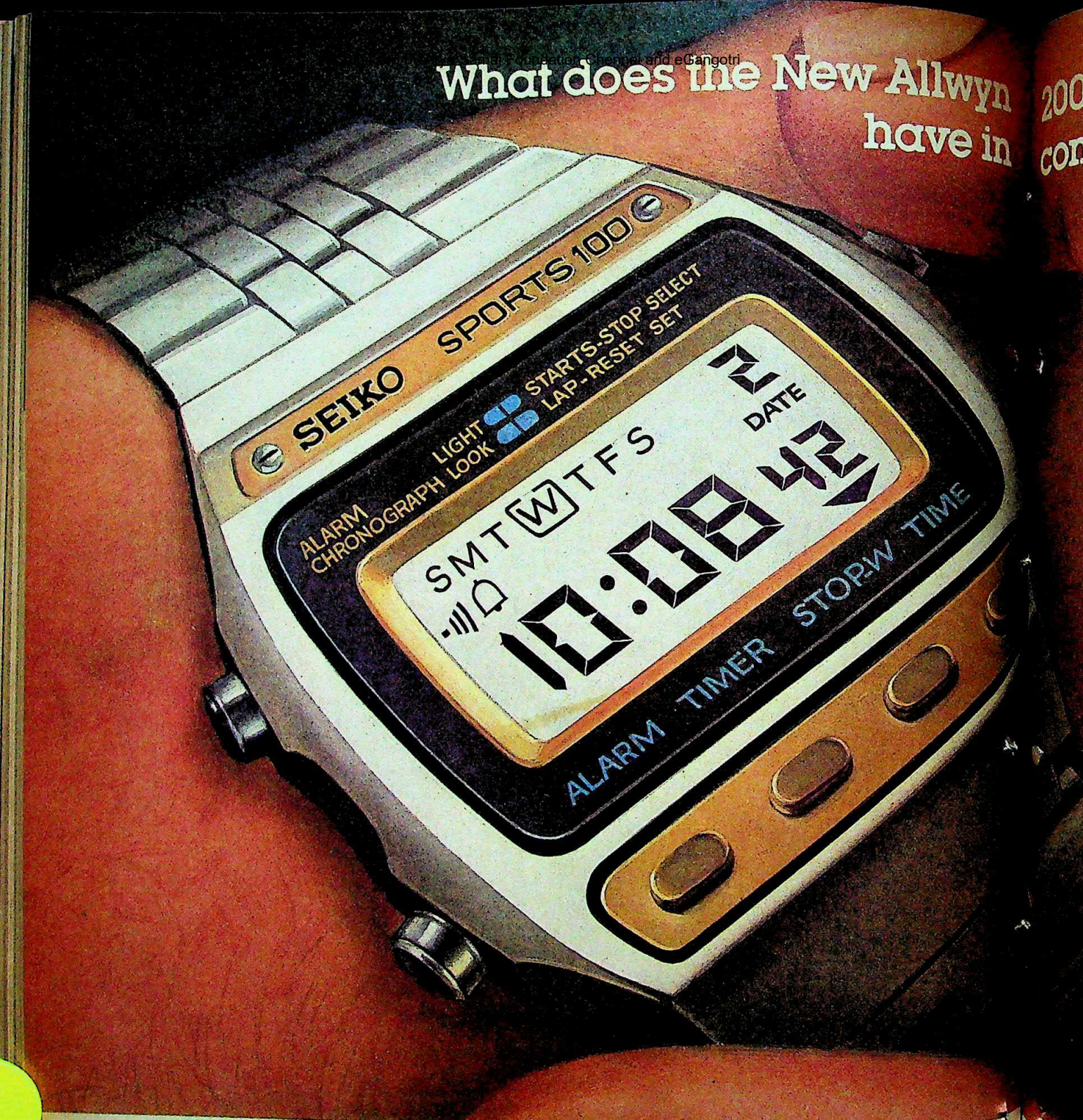
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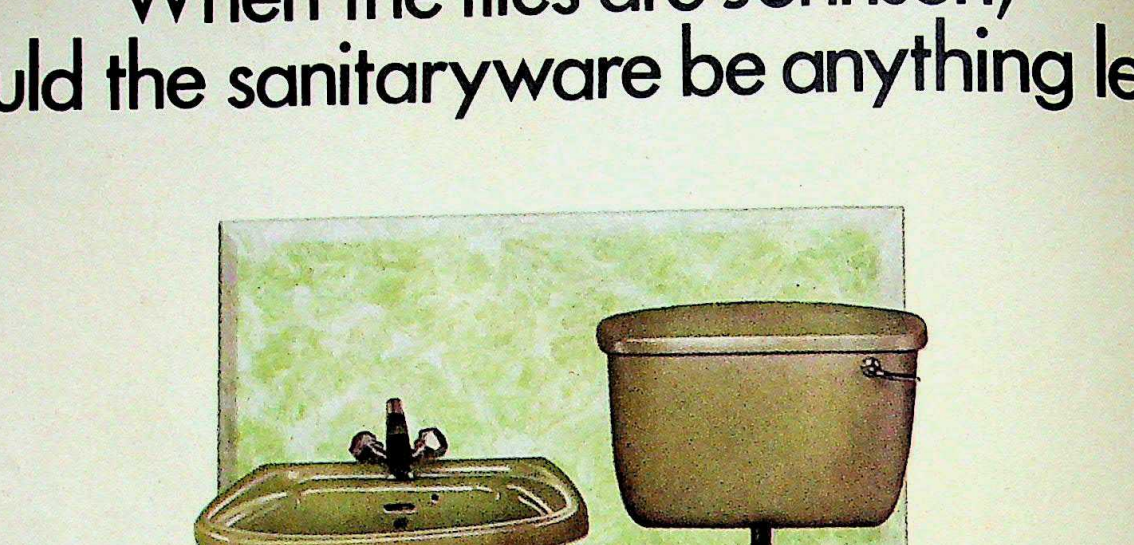


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CIGARETTES

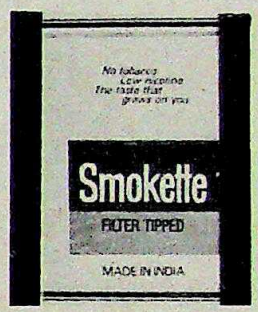
The Haldi Way

LARGE corporations abroad have for years struggled to perfect non-tobacco cigarettes that cut down on tar and nicotine content and yet satisfy smoker needs. But the smokers' response has been almost uniformly discouraging. Undeterred, an Indian company has now hit the market with a similar gambit.

The Calcutta-based Duncan Agro Industries, which introduced a new brand of cigarettes called Smokette in selected eastern cities last month, has gone desi in the hope that this will set the cigarette market alight. Banking on the fact that turmeric leaves have traditionally been smoked in large parts of south India, Duncan has introduced the country's first turmeric cigarette with the sales pitch that it has no side-effects and a far lower tar and nicotine content than tobacco.

Duncan Chairman Gouri Prasad Goenka claims that the initial response has been good. "The entire first lot of over a million sticks has sold out," he points out. But that is not enough of an indication, and consumers willing to experiment give mixed reports. Said K.D. Somadder, a Calcutta businessman: "It is definitely not a cigarette as we understand it. It's a good after-dinner smoke in the sense that as you puff you get a taste of something like a masala paan."

Sales Pitch: Raja Swaminathan, a senior Duncan executive, admitted that the taste took getting used to. Said he: "There is an acrid smell when you smoke Smokette. It is the smell of turmeric and there is no way in which this can be avoided." And the company's leaflet, promoting Smokette as a "non-tobacco choice", appeals "please try at least two packets of Smokettes. The distinct taste and flavour and all the goodness of Smokettes will grow on you with every puff you take".



Duncan was provoked to introduce the unconventional product partly in the hope of cashing in on the growing fear of smoking hazards, and partly because other recent launches have not fared too well: Rothmans, for instance, was introduced three months ago but is selling well below the targeted million sticks a month. Said Goenka: "Our next balance sheet will not look as good as the previous one because total tobacco consumption has dropped. The only way in which we can achieve a breakthrough is by going in for fresh innovations."

That may be sound business logic, but Smokette may not fit the bill. When Duncan introduced menthol cigarettes on the Indian market for the

INSTRUMENTATION LTD

Mixed Readings

JANUARY 1983: A.K. Sah, chairman of the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) writes to the Government complaining in the strongest terms about the performance of a sister public sector concern, Instrumentation Ltd, Kota (ILK) which supplies the instrumentation systems for power projects set up by NTPC.

July 1983: Sah shoots off a second strong letter, this time to ILK's then director (production), A.K. Dhingra, terming ILK's performance as "far from satisfactory", declares further that "whatever activities ILK had to do on their own...they could not come up to the expected level of performance" and talks of "serious gaps in ILK's handling of the contract".

September 1983: ILK loses the contracts for supplying instrumentation systems for the sixth and seventh thermal units being set up by NTPC at Singrauli, in Uttar Pradesh.

January 1984: Volte-face. NTPC gives ILK the prized Rs 14.64 crore contract for supplying instrumentation systems for three 500 mw power units being set up by NTPC at Korba, in Madhya Pradesh.

The tune has certainly changed. Though Sah maintains that "I stand by what I wrote", he justifies giving the order to ILK by saying that "since the new management took over, changes have come about for the better". The "new management" is none other than Dhingra, who has moved up from director (production) to managing director.

The real reason for NTPC's volte- face, however, lies probably in a letter which S.K. Bhatnagar, secretary in the Department of Industrial Development, wrote to Sah pointing out that ILK's order-book is rather lean and saying that he would greatly appreciate it if ILK got the Korba order.




Sah and Dhingra: volte-face

Dhingra is a little taken aback when he is asked about approaching Bhatnagar to put in a word, and follows up a pregnant silence with: "He is my administrative head, and it is his function to see that public sector undertakings do well and make a profit." Sah, however, asserts that "I have not given the contract under anybody's pressure", and adds that Bhatnagar's "letter was treated in the casual and friendly manner in which it was written".

Nevertheless, Sah's own list of charges made earlier about ILK suggest that no change of management could have brought about any improvement in the situation in a couple of months. For the failures included ILK's inability to complete system engineering drawings, lack of experience in tubing work, leaving some important equipment at the Bombay docks for nearly a year, "affecting the life and performance of the equipment", and the poor quality of engineering, manufacturing and testing work. Sah had in fact pointed out that ILK was responsible for NTPC not being able to commission Unit 2 at Singrauli in time, and for delays of as long as two years for Singrauli Unit 3 and Korba Unit 2.

Today, Sah dismisses all these as nothing more than an "administrative analysis" and claims that the administrative and managerial drawbacks have been attended to by the new management of ILK. Dhingra strikes a different note, however, and attributes NTPC's earlier criticism as "more a case of giving a dog a bad name and hanging him". But Dhingra also points out that: "There was a period when we went topsy-turvy. The state Governments owed us Rs 21 crore for works which we had carried out. On account of obstacles in the cash flow, there were delays and with delays came a bad name."

Through this welter of pronouncements on the real nature of the problem and the current situation, one thing stands out clear: if ILK has indeed achieved a turn around in two to three months under a new management, all may end up well with the three Korba units under construction. If not, the "friendly letter" from the Government that bagged the contract for ILK because it was a public sector concern may cause more problems for the country's already problem-ridden power programme.

—PRABHA DUTT

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first time many years ago, they did not do well. And more recently, rival ITC introduced Wills Lights with a low tar content, but once again unsuccessfully. Raja Swaminathan argues that this may have been because the price was too high, at Rs 7 for a pack of 20, compared to which Smokette costs just Rs 2 for a pack of 10.

Apart from the plus point of price, Smokette has other advantages for Duncan: it does not carry the health warning that is statutory for tobacco products, and the exorbitant tax burden that has made the cigarette business unattractive does not apply to the turmeric substitute.

Nevertheless, the central question remains: just because people are prepared to try turmeric vanishing cream, are they also prepared to try a turmeric smoke?

—SUMANTA SEN

THE MARKETS

Cautious Course

LIKE the man who has eaten too well but not too wisely, the stock markets are busy digesting their last year's gains. They have lost a few points in the bargain and might shed a few more in the next few days before the budget. Operators are always cautious on the eve of the budget but they seem to be more cautious than usual this time. The word seems to have gone out from the North Block that although the economy is not doing too badly, there are quite a few screws loose here and there which may have to be tightened before the full benefit of the bumper harvest can be garnered for the corporate sector.

There is no doubt that investors are flush with money and so are apparently the institutions who generally tend to hold back on the eve of the budget lest they should be caught on the wrong foot. For the past two or three weeks there has been a spate of new issues and nearly all of them have been fully subscribed and quite a few oversubscribed two to three times. Investors apparently prefer to put their money on new companies rather than on old ones, and one can't really blame them considering the high prices of most sorips. Money is also going into gold and silver—bullion prices are once again bullish—and almost certainly into real estate. The preferences may change after the budget: money into gold and silver may help speculators but nobody else and the Government must be wondering how best to direct the flow into the corporate sector. Something like Rs 1,500 crore are expected to be raised through the capital market this year and this can't be done without some incentives. The market is awaiting a signal from New Delhi before it can really make up its

KERALA

Nutty State

COCONUTS are almost a way of life in Kerala. So naturally, there is a great deal of concern in the state at the recent spurt in the prices of coconuts and coconut oil. An average-sized coconut now costs more than Rs 3 and the large ones may leave the buyer poorer by as much as Rs 5. And the price of coconut oil has risen by as much as Rs 16 per kg during the past year, and now stands at Rs 36.

Last week, the price of coconut oil shot to an all-time record level of Rs 3,380 a quintal in the Cochin oil market. Three days later Commerce Minister V.P. Singh announced in Cochin that the Central Government proposed to import 10,000 tonnes of coconut oil to contain the price rise. Kerala Chief Minister K. Karunakaran, who was present when Singh made the announcement, hastily pointed out that imports would harm the state's economy and anyway coconut oil imports were not necessary as the price was falling. The minister clarified that the imported oil would be distributed only to consumers in metropolitan cities and not in Kerala.

The import decision is an obvious attempt to pour oil on troubled plantations. Two successive bad monsoons, and the dreaded root wilt disease have combined to slash the coconut harvest from the usual annual figure of 300 million nuts to 200 million nuts. Even the price of Keragem, the oil marketed by the state-owned Kerala State Coconut Development Corporation, has increased to Rs 32 a kg from Rs 10 a kg a year ago. Some estimate of the oil crunch can be had from the fact that palmolein, at Rs 12 a kg, is becoming increasingly popular.



Coconut vendors in Trivandrum

The farmers of course are celebrating, for the price boom has more than offset their decreased sales. There has also been an appreciable increase in the number of farmers cultivating coconuts. As Joint Director of Agriculture (Coconut), R. Hali, says: "Today there is a boom in coconut cultivation in the state." But as coconut palms take a few years to mature, the recently planted trees will only produce nuts in the next few years. Hali added that the drop in production caused by the drought is likely to last for another couple of years.

But by then, with the increased input, it seems as if coconut production in the state will hit an all-time high. The Government has distributed 14 lakh coconut seedlings at a heavily subsidised price. Fertilisers worth Rs 7 lakh have also been given to small and marginal farmers.

Political Pressure: Significantly, there has been no political agitation on the price rise—in a state where political activity needs little excuse. Indeed, farmers are actively lobbying for the state Government to put pressure on the Centre not to allow the import of coconut oil and copra. Said Congress(I) Agriculture Minister A.L. Jacob: "We will stop the import of coconut oil because the farmer in Kerala will suffer."

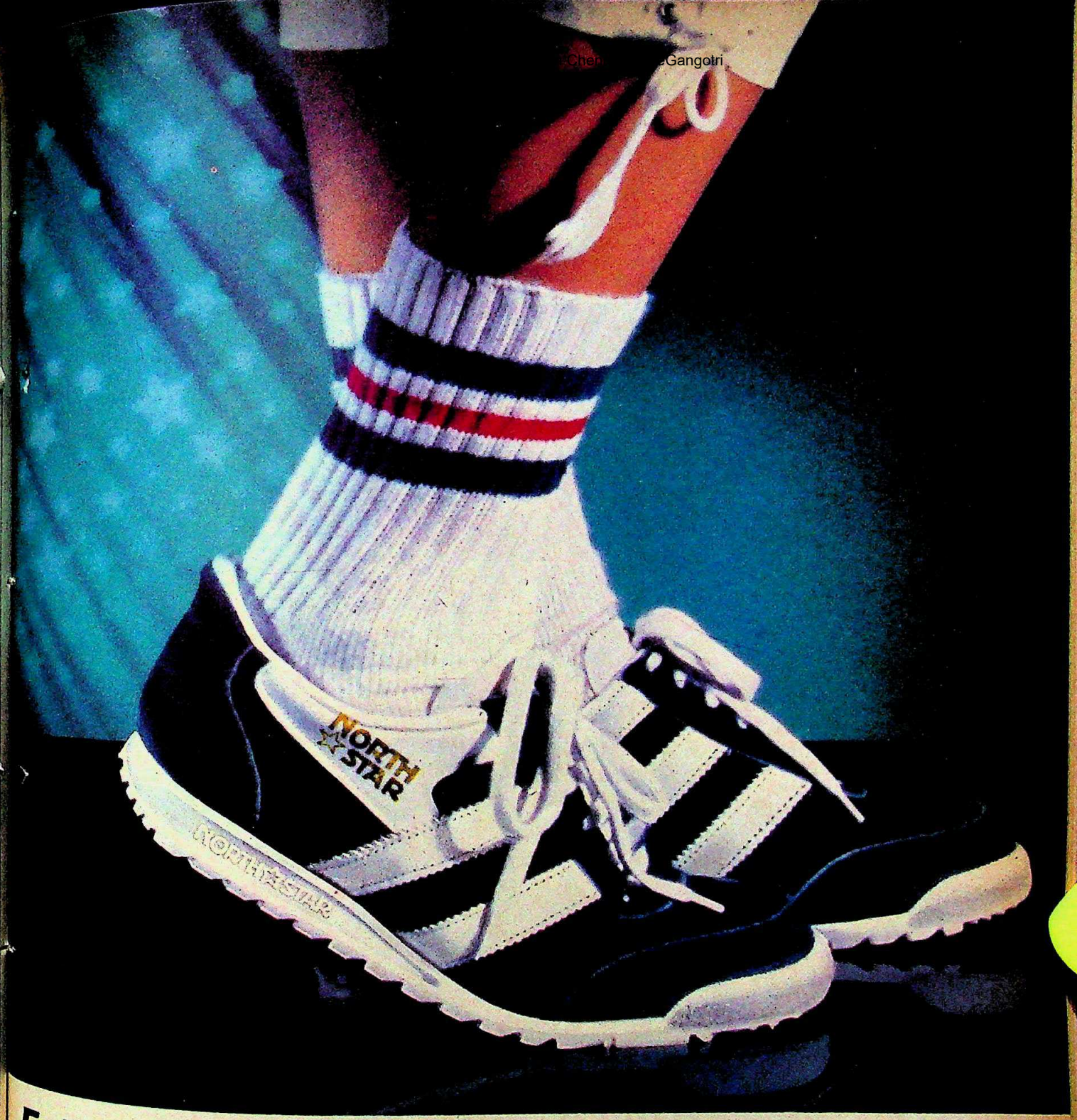
But small-scale soap manufacturers in the state have been badly hit as oil is an important raw material in the manufacture of soap. Said one of them bitterly: "Politicians, in their anxiety to woo the coconut farmers, have sky-rocketed coconut oil prices. Unless they import coconut oil, small-scale industries will have to down their shutters."

Oil dealers, however, are predictably optimistic. Says M.A. Uneri Kutty, a coconut farmer and leading oil merchant: "Purchasing power in Kerala is tremendous due to the Gulf boom and people will buy coconut at any price." He claims that there has been no consumer resistance to the price rise.

People are optimistic that after a good monsoon this year, the crop will improve. That should answer the prayers of the hundreds of coconut vendors in the state whose business is not quite as brisk as it once was.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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Plant.

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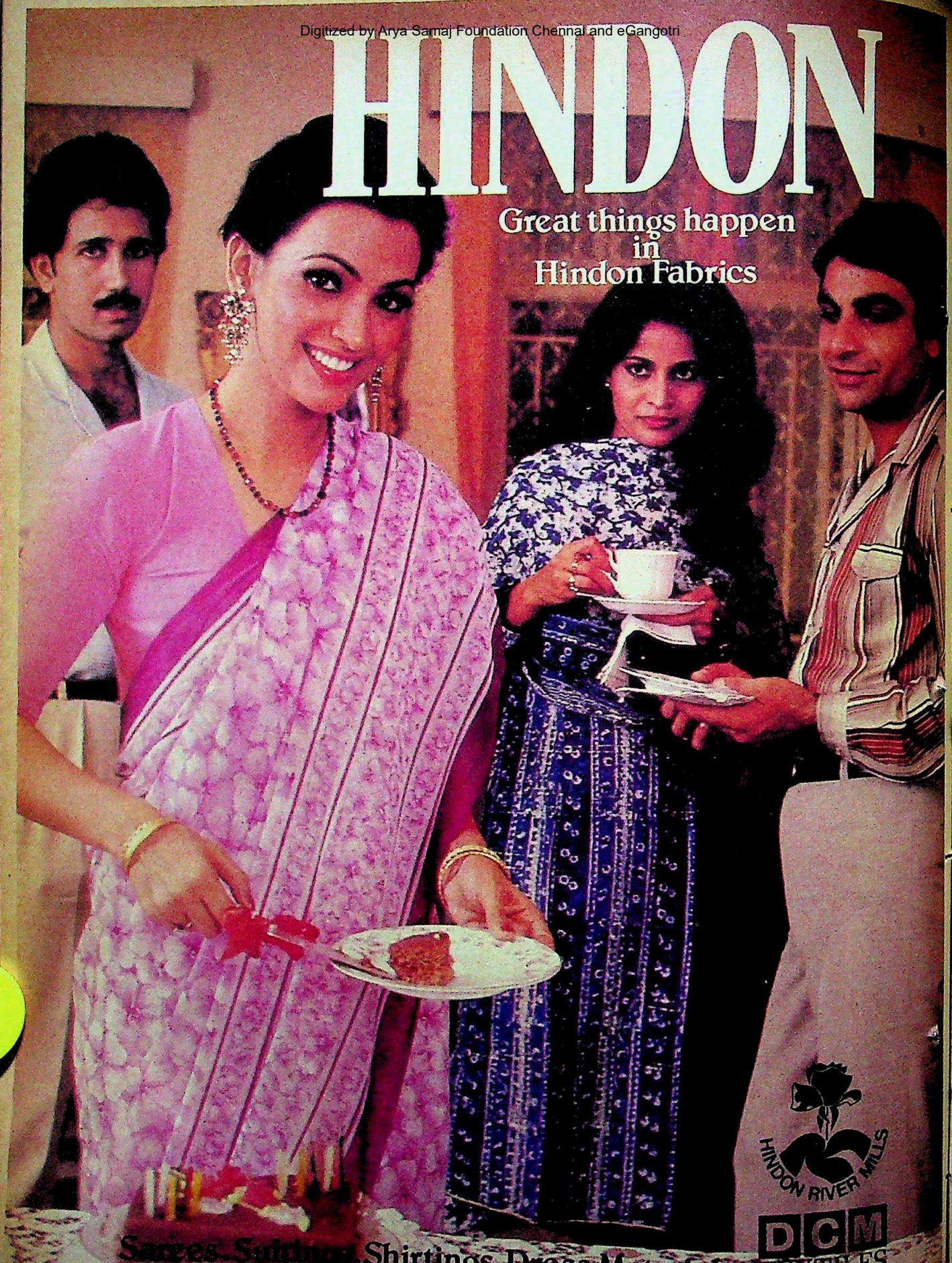
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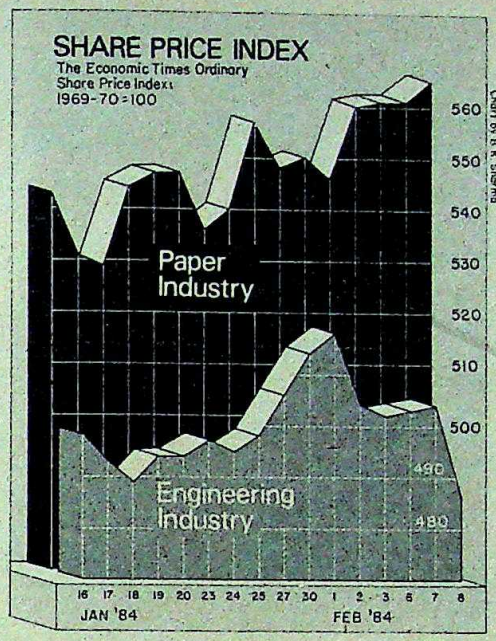
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ACTIVE STOCKS

	High	Low	Close	Change on fortnight
	1984		3.2.84	
Alembic Chemicals	132.50	117.50	122.50	(3.75)
Ashok Leyland	37.50	32.50	36.50	1.50
Asea	53.00	48.00	48.00	(2.00)
Associated Cement	381.50	343.00	345.00	(10.00)
Atlas Copco	43.00	37.50	39.00	nil
Bajaj Auto	1715.00	1510.00	1600.00	20.00
Ballarpur	50.40	47.00	48.50	0.75
Baroda Rayon	257.00	243.00	245.00	(3.00)
BASF	49.00	43.00	46.00	nil
Bata India	35.00	33.30	35.00	1.70
Bharat Commerce	20.65	18.05	18.05	(1.90)
Birla Jute	58.30	54.20	56.80	1.70
Blow Plast	45.00	42.50	43.00	(0.25)
Bombay Dyeing	70.00	63.50	64.00	(2.00)
Bosch	56.00	45.00	47.00	(1.50)
Brooke Bond	36.00	34.10	34.30	(0.60)
Ceat Tyres	280.00	262.50	275.00	(5.00)
Century Spinning	875.00	825.00	875.00	(50.00)
Chloride India	49.25	46.25	48.00	1.25
Coates of India	28.50	26.50	28.50	0.63
Colgate	114.00	100.00	109.00	1.50
Cynamold	38.50	35.00	37.00	6.00
DCM	76.12	61.12	61.12	(9.50)
Dunlop	27.60	26.40	27.00	0.90
East India Hotels	32.00	29.00	31.12	2.00
Elecon Engineering	43.50	39.00	40.50	(0.50)
Escorts	76.00	69.00	69.00	(1.50)
Food Specialities	80.00	71.00	79.00	(1.00)
Gas Carbon	25.00	19.00	19.00	(2.50)
Guest Keen Williams	22.10	21.70	21.95	0.50
Gwalior Rayon	55.00	49.00	55.50	0.50
Herdillia	25.00	23.00	23.00	(0.50)
Hindustan Aluminium	50.05	47.75	48.20	0.45
Hindustan Lever	58.50	48.00	48.75	(0.25)
Hindustan Motors	42.20	40.40	41.16	0.06
Indian Aluminium	24.80	22.75	23.10	0.26
Indian Cable	24.10	23.50	23.50	(0.15)
Indian Explosives	28.00	26.20	26.90	(0.70)
Indian Organic	34.00	31.00	31.00	(0.50)
Indian Oxygen	36.00	34.80	35.10	0.90
Indian Rayon	75.50	67.00	67.00	(1.00)
ITC	32.50	30.65	30.65	0.05
J.K. Synthetics	47.60	44.20	45.10	0.80
Kelvinator	94.00	90.00	94.00	nil
Kesoram	61.60	57.10	57.80	(0.60)
Kinetic Engineering	135.00	126.00	127.00	(3.00)
Kirloskar Cummins	447.50	425.00	442.50	nil
Kothari (Madras)	26.25	23.25	23.75	(1.50)
Larsen & Toubro	79.50	74.50	76.50	3.00
Lipton	33.80	25.40	25.40	(0.10)
Lokia Machines	87.00	78.50	78.50	(1.00)
Madura Coats	24.25	23.50	23.50	(0.25)
Mahindra & Mahindra	61.00	52.00	56.00	2.00
Modi Rubber	28.00	26.37	27.00	1.00
Motor Industries	252.50	231.25	231.25	(7.50)
National Organic	208.25	195.00	200.00	5.00
Orient Paper	53.80	42.30	53.80	4.50
Otis Elevator	58.50	54.50	57.50	(0.50)
Ranbaxy	55.00	48.00	49.00	(0.25)
Raymond Woollen	69.50	63.00	64.00	nil
Reliance	123.00	114.00	115.00	(1.00)
Richardson Hindustan	70.00	60.00	63.00	(5.00)
Sandvik Asia	680.00	610.00	650.00	(20.00)
Shriram Fibres	34.50	32.00	32.75	(0.62)
Siemens	47.50	43.00	45.50	2.00
SPIC	32.75	30.00	30.31	1.69
Straw Products	57.00	50.75	51.00	0.30
Tata Chemicals	58.00	55.50	56.00	(0.75)
Tata Steel	268.50	252.00	267.50	15.50
Telco	420.00	395.00	420.00	23.00
Texmaco	58.40	54.30	56.00	1.70
Union Carbide	28.90	25.60	25.70	0.10
Voltas	395.00	335.00	340.00	5.00
Wimco	43.00	28.50	43.00	11.50
20th Century	49.00	36.50	39.00	(2.00)
Unit Trust	13.80	13.65	13.80	0.15



mind; and that is why the present lull.

Two things worry the market right now: hike in coal prices which is almost certain to trigger off price hikes elsewhere; and the coming crunch in foreign exchange following the Government's decision to forgo the last instalment of the IMF loan. The trade deficit being what it is, the country cannot do without loans or aid, and if there are constraints on both, imports will almost certainly suffer. The budget may offer more incentives to non-residents in which case share prices should look up. After all, where would DCM and Escorts be today without Swraj Paul? Other Pauls must be waiting in the wings, watching the unfolding of the non-resident drama and its final denouement.

By the law of averages, shares which did unduly well last year may do no more than mark time this year, and vice-versa. By this token, tea plantation shares which nearly doubled in price last year should receive a second look. Companies engaged in electrical machinery manufacture fared rather badly last year—though performance varied from company to company and Siemens put up a good show—and should do better in 1984. Most agro-based companies did remarkably well—Oswal Agro was a dark horse when the year started but ran away with the cup—and there is no reason why the performance should not be repeated. Cement has had its day and may not do half as well this year as it did in 1983. Shipping shares are recovering rapidly and should be watched. The MMTC has just signed an agreement with Japan for the export of 8 million tonnes of iron ore, against 6 million tonnes last year. With the expected recovery in the economies of most industrial countries, shipping should receive a boost, though its troubles may not be over yet.

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

Country	Unit & Currency	TT Selling Rates (Rs)	TT Buying Rates (Rs)
Australia	1 As $	10.1276	9.8996
Austria	100 As Sch	56.1663	55.5753
Bahrain	1 Dinar	28.6855	28.4885
Bangladesh	100 Taka	43.5001	43.2014
Canada	1 Can. $	8.6808	8.5862
Denmark	1 D. Kr.	1.0899	1.0756
Egypt	1 Egp. £	13.0333	12.9438
France	1 Fr Frc	1.0899	1.2714
Hong Kong	1 Hk $	1.3900	1.3760
Indonesia	100 Rupiah	1.0886	1.0811
Iran	100 Rial	12.1142	12.0310
Italy	100 It Lira	0.6319	0.6262
Japan	100 Jap Yen	4.6572	4.6111
Kenya	1 K. Shilling	0.7857	0.7803
Kuwait	1 Dinar	36.7229	36.4708
Malaysia	1 Ml $.	4.6426	4.5924
Mauritius	1 Rupee	0.8576	0.8319
Nepal	1 Rupee	0.6864	0.6817
Netherlands	1 D Glds	3.5006	3.4638
Pakistan	1 Rupee	0.8002	0.7947
Singapore	1 Sing. $	5.1014	5.0469
Spain	100 Sp Pt.	6.8198	6.7593
Sri Lanka	1 Rupee	0.4319	0.4289
Sweden	1 Sw Kr.	1.3431	1.3246
Switzerland	1 Sw Frc.	4.9193	4.8648
Tanzania	1 T. Sch.	0.8653	0.8603
Thailand	100 Baht	47.7848	47.3681
UK	1 Pound	15.4345	15.2999
USA	1 US $.	10.8350	10.7125
UAE	1 Dihram	2.9459	2.9257
USSR	1 Rouble	13.5213	13.4284
W. Germany	1 DM	3.9535	3.9095

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo, Ltd., New Delhi and quoted between the banks on February 6, 1984.

ECONOMIC TRENDS

	Latest	Change on month
PRICES		
ET Commodity Price Index*		
February 4, 1984	285.7	nil
Cereals	260.1	3.5
Chemicals	324.3	3.7
Industrial Fibres	190.2	(8.3)
Metals	374.7	(0.2)
Sugar	204.4	(5.2)
Textile Yarn	224.8	2.1
Vegetable Oils	374.1	(5.7)
Gold, standard		
February 4, 1984 (Rs per 10 gm)	1,890.00	185.00
Silver, .999		
February 4, 1984 (Rs per kg)	3,485.00	(35.00)
SHARES		
ET Share Price Index*		
February 4, 1984	276.5	(10.2)
Cement	228.4	(36.0)
Chemicals	220.6	(3.8)
Engineering	504.6	(8.0)
Fertilisers	249.8	(5.7)
Man-made Fibres	418.4	(11.3)
Paper	546.6	(27.9)
Rubber Goods	198.4	(17.0)
MONEY		(per cent)
Money Supply, January 6, 1984		2.5
Bank Deposits		3.4
Foreign Exchange Assets		(30.9)

* 1969–70 = 100

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Transfer to general reserve	1,60,000	1,25,000
Balance carried to balance sheet	12,259	6,023
TOTAL RUPEES	5,72,259	4,31,023

See notes annexed

Per our report attached to the balance sheet

S. S. Londhe

Chartered Accountant

BOMBAY: 9th September, 1983

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Loaded with helpful features

Like a microprocessor with diagnostic capability telling you if trouble is brewing (paper jams, for instance). So that you can get the fault corrected and keep the downtime down.

A copy interrupt function that lets you stall a long copy run, duplicate a different original and get back to the first copy run.

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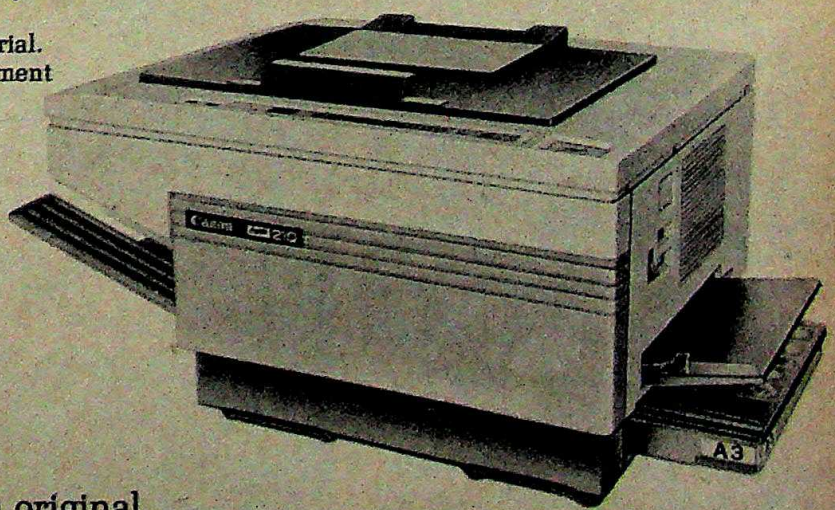
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FARMING

Triumph in the Terai

ONE OF the major Akali demands has been the regularisation of land holdings of the Sikh farmers in the terai region along the Himalayan range in Uttar Pradesh—a region cut off from the world for centuries. The Akalis allege that Sikhs who settled in the terai shortly after Partition and cleared the most inhospitable ravines to build some of the country's most prosperous farms are now being evicted and left destitute. In fact they cite this as a major example to substantiate their charge of discrimination against Sikhs. But as INDIA TODAY *Correspondent* SHEKHAR GUPTA *discovered in the course of a 1,400-km drive through the terai, the situation is rather different. There have been no evictions and the Punjabi farmers, who have achieved a degree of prosperity far higher than their brethren back home in Punjab make light of the threats and continue the "colonisation" further into the districts of Shahjehanpur and Lakhimpur Kheri. His report:*

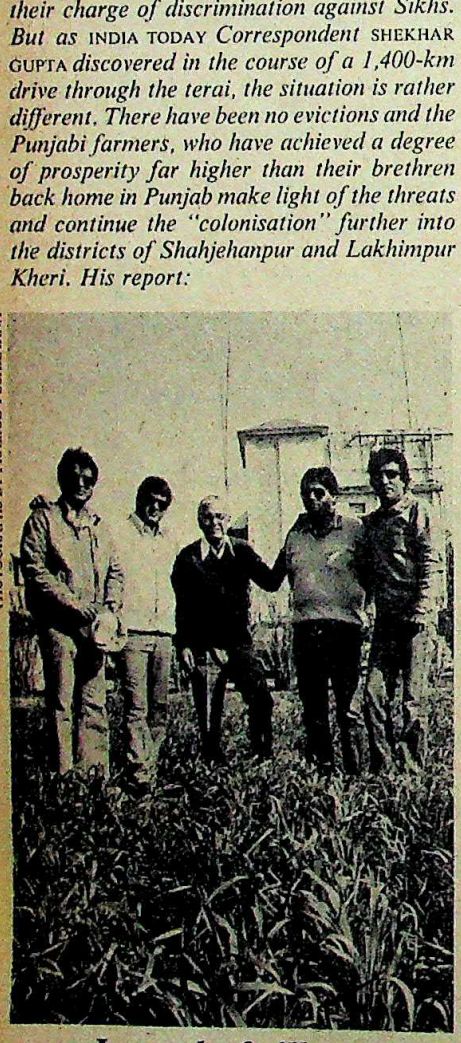
BEGINNING with Kashipur, at the western tip of Nainital district in Uttar Pradesh, the road eastward meanders through the lushest of Green Revolution country, all covered with tall sugarcane interspersed with patches of blooming mustard. Surprisingly, there are not many villages along the road. Just a few typically Bengali huts by the roadside and small towns, predominantly populated by Sikhs. In fact, if the region differs in any way from the most prosperous areas in Punjab, it is in having a much larger number of tractors in the countryside—in fact, a majority of roadside filling stations sell only diesel.

Instead of villages, what appear intermittently on the horizon breaking the not-unpleasant monotony of farms are massive farmhouses, their TV antennae gleaming symbols of the bounty these farmers harvest in the terai. The signboards along the road read: Cheema Farm House, Garewal Farms, Bhatia Farms, and so on. Besides, there are the Kapoors, the Balis, the Mehtas, Prakash Singh Badal, Air Chief Marshal (Retd) Arjun Singh—the Punjabi domination of the area is complete.

Says Dr J.S. Sharma, professor of agricultural economics at the Govind Ballabh Pant University of Agriculture and Technology which takes the credit for much of the farm revolution in the terai: "This is a region unlike any other, a different world in itself. In fact along the years, we have been encouraging our researchers to go and work in other areas, more representative of the country's farming problems." He says terai yields are easily comparable to Punjab's—and on lower investments on inputs.

Uneasy Prosperity: Ironically, it is this prosperity that has exposed the terai farmers to threatening possibilities. Thirty years ago, when the first batches of settlers came, the terai was sparsely inhabited by Tharu and Buxha tribals who have still not taken to organised farming. But they were gradually dispossessed of all their lands by the settlers, mainly the Punjabis who paid ridiculously low prices, like a bottle of liquor for an acre.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Instead of villages, what appear intermittently on the horizon are massive farmhouses, their TV antennae gleaming symbols of the bounty these farmers harvest in the terai.



(Left) P.N. Mehta with his sons and (centre) the Mehta family at home; (right) Bhola Singh

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The tribals now want their lands back

and in June 1981 the Uttar Pradesh Govern-
ment passed an ordinance banning sale of
land by tribals to non-tribals. Simultaneous-
ly, a decision was taken not to regularise hol-
dings of the settlers who had bought land
from the tribals in the past. As a follow up,
eviction notices were served to 16,000 far-
mers, mainly Punjabis.

Even the Minorities Commission,
which examined the Akali complaint on the
terai farmers, agreed with the Government's
stand on prevention of tribal land alienation.
However, thanks to the Akali agitation, the
Uttar Pradesh Government has hastily given
up the scheme. Admitted an official: "In
1981, we meant business. But now the
scheme is as good as dead."

The second threat affected the bigger
farmers and came from the ceiling laws. Says
Jagannath Bali, the 85-year-old patriarch of
the terai farmers (*see box*): "Land ceiling is
the death of good farming. The communists
want this because they get their power out of
destruction." But the Akali agitation has
even forced the Government to go slow on
the ceiling laws. Says, P.N. Mehta owner of a
large farm: "In a way, the Akalis have
helped us as well. The pressures have eased
since the agitation began." So, unmindful of
the increasingly distant checks, the farmers
go on adding to their already swelling kittys.

Large Holdings: It shows in the life-sty-
les of the farmers. The bigger ones have got
around the ceiling laws by using the simple
expedient of cooperative farming to retain
farms that often sprawl over a thousand
acres. This enables them to go in for mecha-
nisation in a big way. Mehta, a former vice-
president of Escorts running his 1,200-acre
farm in partnership with his family and ab-
sentee landlords that include film stars
Randhir Kapoor and Babita, says: "You
can't imagine how this place has changed. In
the '50s we shot tigers within 50 yards of our
farmhouse."

He goes on to recall how the Rajas of
Kashipur and Rampur who jointly owned
nearly 2,200 acres of land in the region had
been unable to bring more than 50 acres
under the plough after three years of efforts.
"The Government's condition for the lease
was that if they were unable to bring the land
under cultivation by November 1951, it
would be resumed. The rajas sold the land on
July 3, 1951, and, sure enough, we brought in
the tractors and combines and did not lose
even an inch by default to the Government,"
he says, surveying his farm with pride.

But enterprise has brought the Mehta
family more than pride. Their massive farm-
house displays five TV antennae, air-condi-
tioners projecting from every room, and car-
pets, chandeliers and fine furniture inside.
The house itself is a prefabricated one, im-
ported from Switzerland. Mehta lives here
with his four young sons, their wives and
children in a modern, 20th century world of
the farmer's joint family. Says his 38-year-
old son Subhash: "No, we don't miss out on
city life. After all Delhi is just three or four
hours away by car and here we do have a
social circle with more and more young
people settling on the farms." And as one of
the brothers explains, VCR's have taken care
of the movie problem.

High Living: While the Mehtas live in a
world of beer parties in the lawns and shikar
in Kumaon foothills, the more traditional fa-
milies let their prosperity show in different
ways. Churamani Singh, who owns a large
farm near Bahedi in Bareilly district, has an
elephant for a pet, besides his massive pair of
Great Danes, an Alsatian and a number of
smaller dogs. Known in the region as "sher-
wala zamindar", he had a pet tiger who died
a fortnight ago, aged 21.

Says his son Surendra Pal Singh: "We
got the lands as political sufferers in the 1942
Quit India Movement. It was all jungle and
we happened to catch three tiger cubs and
two elephants which we reared as pets. It is
so terrible the last of the tigers died, but we
are trying to buy new cubs from some circus
now." Outside his farmhouse, on the edge of
the road, lies his tiger cage with signboards
warning passers-by to keep away from the
bars. Smaller farmers go for different status
symbols like bigger tractors, guns and now
colour TVs.

But this prosperity did not come easy.
Recalls Tarlochan Singh, manager of the
State Bank branch at Nanakmata, a predo-
minantly Sikh township on the edge of the
terai belt, facing the foothills bordering
Nepal: "When we migrated here, the place
had no more than mosquitoes, snakes and ti-
gers. We would work for a while in the day,
then get into the mosquito-net. It was so bad,
if your arm touched the mosquito-net you
were bitten from outside. Nearly one-fourth
of the settlers died." Bhola Singh, a small
Raisikh farmer of Nanakmata, remembers
the early days with awe: "More than farming
it was a problem of keeping the jungle away.
You ignored the lands for a few weeks and
they would become jungle again."

The settlers may be put in three catego-
ries. The Punjabi refugees who came in from



Singh outside the Nanakmata Gurudwara



"The tribals here know nothing about farming. So they did not know the value of their lands and sold it to us for no price. Now they see the land is producing gold and want it back."

—JAGTAR SINGH

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J.N. BALI

Indigenous Enterprise

I AM PROUD to be a farmer," says the sticker on the wall. The book lying by his bedside is Georg Borgstrom's famous *Too Many: An Overview Of Earth's Limitations*. The geyser-like tank in the bathroom is painted with Sanskrit *shlokas* in praise of the sun god, and connected to the solar-heater outside. And as turbaned Jagannath Bali goes around lighting the gobar gas lamps all over his house, the farmer's pride shows all over his weather-beaten eyes which have, to twist a metaphor, seen 85 monsoons.

His 400-acre farm near Kashipur in the Nainital district of Uttar Pradesh blooms in good health and prosperity. So do almost all the others. But what makes Bali stand out is his total dependence on the traditional Indian systems of farming. He uses no tractors, no harvester combines, just the good old bullocks. His yields are comparable to the best farms in Punjab (wheat: 20 quintals per acre; sugarcane: 400 quintals) and higher than some of the country's most heavily mechanised farms in the terai region.

Enterprising Spirit: Bali was one of the numerous Punjabis who came to the ravines of the terai from western Punjab in 1947 with no resources except their in-built resilience and enterprise. Almost immediately he took to tractors, clearing the jungle and levelling virgin land. By 1965 he had 14 tractors and by the standards of the mid-'60s, a considerably mechanised, 1,100-acre farm. "It was then that I began having second thoughts. There were so many breakdowns. We were short of diesel. Half the tractors used to be in the workshops. So I decided to sell them off," he says.

He reared, instead, 47 pairs of bullocks, modified at his own little workshop the seed drills, harrows and other implements for use with bullocks instead of tractors and began the experiment. Says he: "I realised it was much cheaper, safer and more profitable. How many bullocks have you seen in the hospitals? Labour-intensive farming is what India needs."

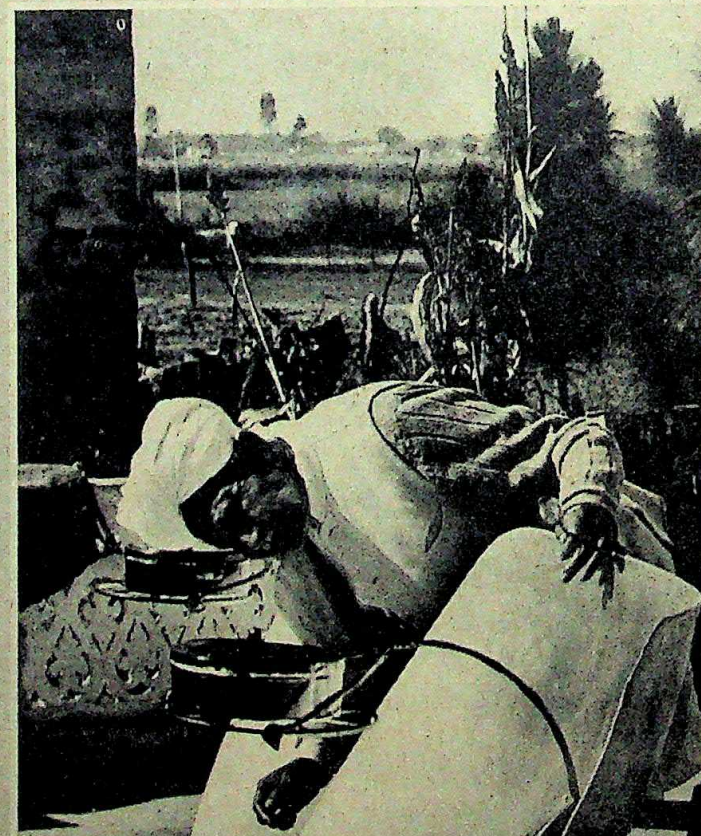
Studies have proved time and again that while bullocks are less than half as expensive to maintain, they are nearly as efficient as tractors. Besides, they create nearly three times as much employment. But Bali counts more gains. He has to use very little chemical fertiliser since his cows and bullocks produce so much farm manure. "It has 3 per cent nitrogen. Will you get a better fertiliser?" he says.

The plant not only takes care of his entire establishment's lighting and fuel needs, he has also modified his old refrigerator to use its power. But the most remarkable use of the plant is for a massive 30 horsepower engine from an old Nissan truck which in turn runs his threshers, shredders and other implements—all at no recurring cost, while he has the manure intact. His dairy contains more than 200 cows. He has no exotic crosses—just good Indian breeds. Says he: "My cows average 15 litres of milk a day. All they need is good feeding. Crosses are great in theory but they cannot adapt to new climates and their subsequent generations are, to say the least, disastrous."

Valuable Advice: But one bit of "foreign" advice he took in 1955 proved rather fruitful. Hearing that the Israelis had begun using solar heaters he obtained some manufacturers' catalogues through their trade commissioner in Bombay and, with the help of his illiterate blacksmith, built his own. These dot his compound and, ever since, it has been his hobby to offer guests food cooked on these.

"This nature has so much that we fail to harness and it is so simple," he says, walking past his farm dotted with artesian wells out of which water gushes continuously. But, he says: "With the reduction in the size of the farm, most of these have gone."

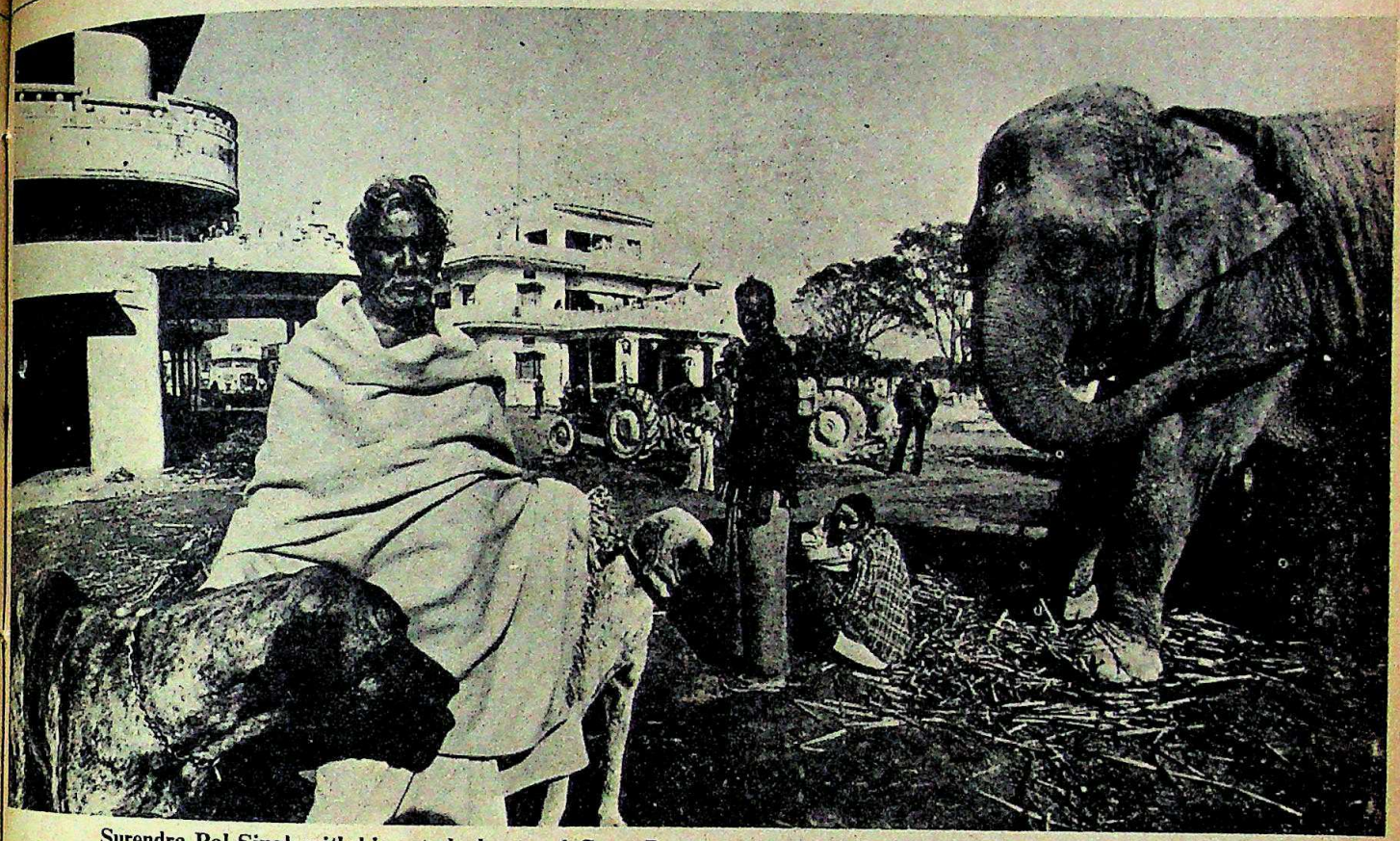
So, unfortunately, has a bit of the Bali spirit. In the evening of his life, the man who has fascinated the world's greatest farm experts, is disillusioned and plans to convert much of his farm into forest by planting eucalyptus. "I am so old now. My life is over. I have no energy for farming. And who among the new generation wants to do farming now? They do not want to dirty their hands. They want sophisticated business." He also confesses having hired a tractor this year for "a little bit of work here and there" because "I am myself too short of energy now to manage the farm as in the past." And even more unfortunately, in the prosperous farmlands of the terai, there seems to be no one willing to continue his experiment—all the committed disciples he acquired were foreign, mainly American students who had long sabbaticals at his farm and contributed much to his valuable experiment.



Jagannath Bali with his solar heater: back to nature

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Surendra Pal Singh with his pet elephant and Great Danes, tractors and farmhouse: hard-earned prosperity

...est in the course of the Partition and were offered lands here along with other inmates; the Kumaoni ex-servicemen who were settled on small pieces of land; and freedom fighters of eastern Uttar Pradesh who were gifted lands here. In addition came hordes of destitute Raisikhs and Mazhabis, the so-called low-caste Sikh groups who bought lands from the local tribals, the Tharus and the Buxhas for a song, deep in the ravines and waged the most daunting battle against nature. And it is mainly this lot that the Akalis talk about.

All terai farmers—not just the Punjabis—speak of new threats to their hard-earned prosperity. For the big farmers have avoided the ceiling laws, dividing land among their family members, friends and absolutely imaginary partners in the cooperatives. A scrutiny of a number of cooperative society records shows ridiculous names such as *Majh* Kaur, Khurpi Ram, Tamatar Singh and *Tamatar* in Punjabi are (buffalo, hoe and tomato) as partners in societies owning some of the biggest farms. In reject the standard reply from farm-owners to queries regarding the size of their farms is: "Is it on or off record?"

The smaller farmer is in more genuine trouble. In the subdivision of Khatima, bordering Nepal, for example, most of the farmland is now owned by Sikh farmers who themselves admit having bought it at virtually no price from the Tharu tribals. Says lanky Jagtar Singh, who owns 10 acres: "The tribals here know nothing about farming. So they did not know the value of their lands and sold it to us for no price. Now they see the land is producing gold and want it back."

Irregular Sales: The fact is that most purchases were made irregularly and have not been formalised by the Revenue Department. Says Gurdev Singh, a former Planning Commission officer and now accountant of the sprawling Nanakmata Gurudwara: "There have been no evictions but Punjabis feel insecure with the growth of local chauvinism as their land-deeds are not being regularised. But believe me, if they start evictions, more than half of the Punjabis will die before they leave." Adds retired Captain Sohan Singh, who owns a small farm: "The Akalis perhaps talk of the Sikhs in the terai because of political reasons. But it has helped us in the sense that the Uttar Pradesh Government has decided to go slow."

But the Akali agitation has only fuelled the tribal anger further and it shows in the activities of the Rana Tharu Yuvak Parishad, the organisation formed six years ago to free tribal lands. Says its Vice-President Guman Singh Rana: "We already have an Assam-like situation here with outsiders controlling all our lands. Our people's fate is like that of grain full of termites. But it is futile to expect help from the Government as this is Narain Dutt Tiwari's constituency and he wants the Punjabi vote." Adds General Secretary Jagat Deb Shastri: "People who owned the lands originally now pick cow-dung from the farms of the new owners. We are angry."

Obviously, the rather sudden colonisation of a region cut off from the world for centuries has resulted in social tensions and the government machinery is placed in an unenviable situation, with pressures to stop tribal land alienation and also to guard the interests of the settlers who have done hard work and have political clout outside the state. But the settlers themselves seem oblivious of it as is evident from the pace of fresh Punjabi colonisation in the terai region deeper in the east (in the Lakhimpur Kheri district) where land still sells at under Rs 4,000 per acre—the Nainital terai price is Rs 30,000 per acre now.

Jagannath Bali sums it up thus: "Why should we let this dampen our spirit? Don't we say in Punjabi that when you go out selling stolen clothes, you shouldn't bother if the buyer measures a bamboo-length as a yard? We got this land so cheap, so what if it goes the same way?" But now, it perhaps will not. For a government besieged with a three-year-old agitation, a go-slow on the rather esoteric concepts of tribal land restoration and ceiling laws is a minor price to buy a little peace.

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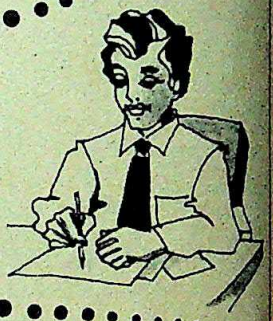


BRONCHIAL PROBLEMS



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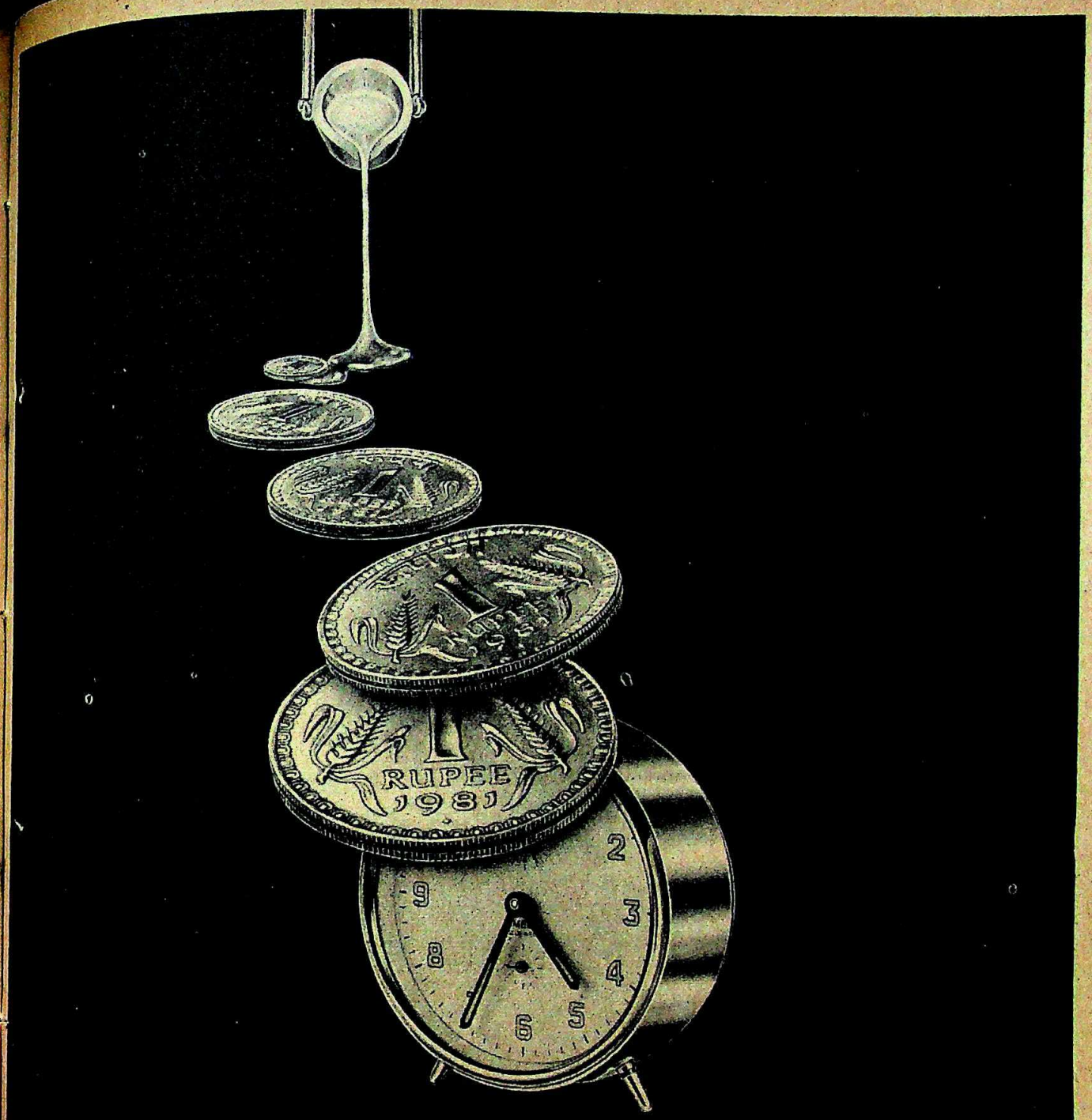
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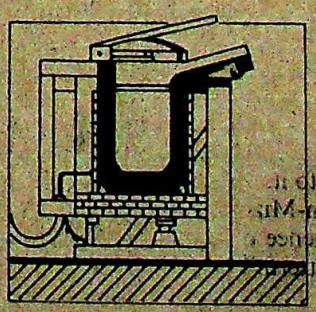
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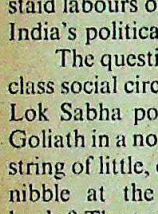
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GENERAL ELECTIONS

Davids and Goliath



THOMAS Mann wrote that men got angry and excited in their opposition to ideas or phenomena "when we ourselves are not quite certain of our own positions". In the Indian politicscape, everyone is angry and excited in opposing everyone else because no one is certain of his own position. The analyst is also angry for he finds no order in the welter of confronting politcal postures. He is unable to simplify a bewilderingly complex problem. Neither the bristles of politicians' rhetoric nor the staid labours of the analysts seem to penetrate the thickening fog in India's political life.

The question that is being asked in diplomatic as well as middle class social circuits is: how would the Opposition fare in the coming Lok Sabha poll? Will it emerge as a David taking on the ruling Goliath in a no-holds-barred poll battle? Or will it be no more than a string of little, effete Davids, able only to nibble at the Goliath's massive vote banks? The true answers to these absorbing questions lie with the Unknown Indian, the voter in the villages. Therefore, intrepid media institutions have begun to explore the great terra incognito of Indian politics.

Pollstering is not exactly an Indian forte. We have done better in analytical studies of election results. However, pollstering exists in the 'modern' sector of Indian intellection. The most prestigious in this slippery field is the Indian Institute of Public Opinion (IIPO), headed by Dr Eric Da Costa. The IIPO conducts a survey of "voting intentions" before each Lok Sabha poll. Over the last 25 years, it has fashioned certain tools to gauge the voting intention of the elector and to weigh the comparative electoral prospects of contending parties. Da Costa's powerful nose can smell the pungent odour of an election a-coming as much as a police dog can smell the odour of a runaway criminal. When Da Costa conducts a poll of voting intentions, a parliamentary election is not normally far away.

Unpredictable Surveys: The two attempts to gauge the voter's mood confuse the analyst rather than enlighten him. *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and INDIA TODAY poll sampled 1,600 voters in eight cities, four metropolitan and four small, and came to the conclusion that the Congress(I) had a sharp edge over the opposition groups, with about 45 per cent voter support. About 79 per cent of those who voted for the Congress(I) in January 1980 would vote for it again in 1984. According to this survey, the Congress(I) has not lost its electoral support base. What this survey has in common with the IIPO poll is that while Mrs Gandhi's personal charisma remains very high, and a clear majority of people would vote for her and her party, the public image of the performance of her government is pretty low.

The IIPO survey found the mood of the people in the Hindi heartland—Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, to which its survey was limited—to be one of gloom both about the present and the future. The IIPO's director came to the conclusion, after working out certain sophisticated mathematical exercises, that if elections were held "now", the Congress(I) would capture 55-60 per cent of the seats in the Hindi belt. This is not a veni-vidi-vici picture. It hardly compensates for what the party is likely to lose in the South and in Maharashtra.

Even in many of the other social science surveys, the villages are found to serve the men from the cities only with half-truths and lies. What if he took the stranger from Delhi asking him who he would vote for in the next parliamentary poll to be a policeman in disguise or an agent of the *sarkar*? If the voter in the small town and village regards the performance of the Government to be poor and his own present condition and future prospects bleak, does he blame the State Government only or hold the Centre fully or equally responsible? To what extent is the strong charisma of Indira Gandhi eclipsed by the murky image of the local Congress(I) chieftains?

Answers to these and many other legitimate questions we do not have because we have little knowledge of the mind of the electorate, the bulk of whom reside in the villages. For several weeks now, with the silhouette of election framed on the political horizon, the parties are, or are believed to be, building up a massive grassroot response to their respective claims to the vote. Congress(I) legislators have been ordered to hold some 50,000 meetings and rallies before the ides of March. The opposition parties too have resolved to scour grassroots India, a land of myths and realities, part clover, part briarpatch. What are the issues boiling up from the people? Are any issues boiling up at all? Do the issues handed down from above —threats from within and without, unity of India in danger, disintegration lurking ahead—chime with the issues the people consider to be serious?

Will the Opposition emerge as a David taking on the ruling Goliath in a no-holds-barred poll battle? Or will it be no more than a string of little, effete Davids, able only to nibble at the Goliath's massive vote banks?

Main Issues: Grassroot issues and national issues exercise unequal impact on American presidential elections. American public opinion polls show that when asked to name major national concerns affecting their present and future life, grassroot Americans tick off most the issues that are on the agenda of the national capital. But beneath these broad concerns are local and regional issues which directly affect the lives of the people. These do not normally influence presidential elections because of the ability of TV to wean the American voter away from local issues to national ones. Nevertheless, local issues do tend to influence the voter.

What are the issues that will compose the political chemistry of India's 1984 parliamentary poll? From her position of vantage, the prime minister has been trying to set the issues: strength and unity of the country, threats to its integrity and sovereignty, danger of war in the region and in the world, the imperatives of a strong Centre, the perils of separatism. Her election year political strategy is, quite predictably, to heave these issues out on top of the people's minds. If time and time do not permit her to spread her charisma on the voters over the country, she has an ambitious programme to extend the reach of the TV screen to 70 per cent of the population before April.

The remarkable thing about the coming election is that, despite the continuing problems in Punjab and Assam or perhaps because of them to some extent, the prime minister has determined to get the people not to fling about sparks of her charisma but to ask for a mandate to grapple with national, regional and world issues. This presumably ses to lift the election battle to a higher political level than in the

The equally remarkable thing about the Opposition is that its fragments are not only aware of the political challenge thrown at them by Mrs Gandhi but are also flaunting their own political challenge at her. The Calcutta conclave of 17 opposition groups set a bench-mark in Indian politics because these diverse factions resolved there to unite on a series of issues and challenge the prime minister and her party on others. Conclave-style politics has set off two significant trends, which, however, are still to become processes.

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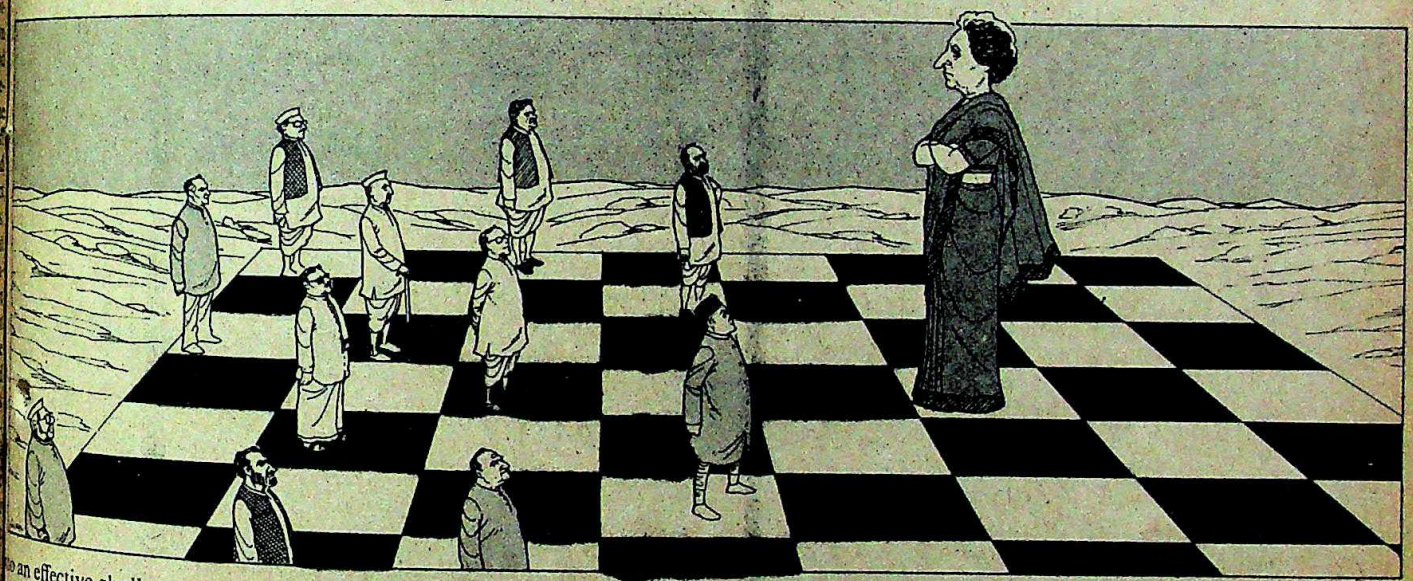
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One is an amalgamating trend: from Vijayawada to Calcutta, in a matter of nine months, 16 opposition factions were galvanised into two Fronts, the United Front and the Left Front, with strong chances of their descending on the pollground in unison. The opposition parties of chief ministers, like the Telugu Desam of N.T. Rama Rao, and the Jammu & Kashmir National Conference of Farooq Abdullah, are likely to incline towards the fronts' common platform.

THE OTHER, potentially more positive trend is to use issues to bond the opposition factions for the election and beyond the elections. Participants in the Calcutta conclave realised that a Jayaprakash Narayan-type of mass movement was neither possible nor desirable in 1984. Indeed, the opposition groups just cannot treat 1984 as to another Janata-like horror movie in the 1980s. If the opposition groups are to unite, unity must be erected from below; it cannot be knocked together in Delhi as it could in 1977. In 1984 there is neither a leader like JP nor an enormous provocation like the Emergency. Lacking entirely in charismatic leaders on a national scale, the opposition factions can only strive to galvanise themselves Hindi heartland. Southern politics was also more issue-oriented than politics in the north which is lacerated by inter-personality clashes among a group of ossified leaders whose blood is warmed by political ambitions even when their bodies and wits shrink with age.

The third positive factor at the Calcutta conclave was the firm unity of the communist left, with two additional gains for the Opposition, namely, the CPI's resolve to stay with the CPI(M) regardless of the Soviet political line on India, and the Marxist's willingness to concede a generous number of constituencies to Janata and CPI. The fourth positive trend was the clear possibility of electoral and post-electoal unity between the Left Front and the United Front. "The left parties were outside the pale of the Janata coalition", the opposition leader referred to above recalled. "That allowed them to vote against the Janata government in September 1979. This time, the Left Front will be part and parcel of a combined opposition". He did not think that the communists would be a major factor in the combination. "The CPI(M) wants to play a minor role," he added.

Right Atmosphere: On the negative side, according to the opposition leader, "we have been able to create a political atmosphere for



an effective challenge to the Congress(I) through grassroot movements on issues and problems that agitate the minds of the voters.

Image Building: One of the opposition leaders who played a galvanising role at the Calcutta conclave said that the conclave participants realised that they could not expect to persuade the majority of voters to vote against the Congress(I) if they failed to build a credible image of a ruling alternative to it. "It is not enough that we forge electoral unity so that the anti-Congress vote doesn't split. Our unity must go beyond the election. We must be able to knock together a common platform of issues. Above all, we must be seen by the electorate as a credible alternative."

He identified three positive developments at the Calcutta conclave. First, the chief ministers of Kashmir and Andhra Pradesh had "fully and decisively" cast their lot with the Opposition. "There will still be some problems about sharing of constituencies in Andhra Pradesh. NTR's present mood is that the Telugu Desam should get all the constituencies, and it should be supported by other opposition parties. But this mood may change if another regional party is formed in Andhra Pradesh by Vengala Rao. We do hope that at election time, NTR will be willing to share constituencies with other opposition groups who have a presence in Andhra Pradesh." The second positive factor, he said, was the joining of the DMK of Tamil Nadu with the conclave Opposition. "We have virtually the entire South with us, which in itself is of tremendous import." Southern politics, he claimed, was less fragmented than politics in the building a united opposition, but we have not been able to project an alternative to the Congress(I)." An early election, therefore, would go against the advantage of the opposition groups who would need several more conclaves to bring an order amongst themselves.

He said that the opposition groups realised in Calcutta that "on issues alone we can throw the ruling party on the defensive". He claimed that the prime minister's January 15 TV broadcast in which she announced the renewal of the long-suspended food-for-work programme in a new form, as well as the laying off of the last tranche of the IMF loan, was an instant response to the focus on economic issues at the Calcutta conclave.

The sum total of all this is that while Goliath has already unfurled the flag and started wooing the unknown Indian voter with a massive array of enticing rewards including nearly free bank 'loans', the opposition parties are still in a state of slow, painful fermentation. Trends are discernible. Processes are still to emerge with reliable clarity. It is, however, possible to foresee an overall picture of the Opposition at the hustings.

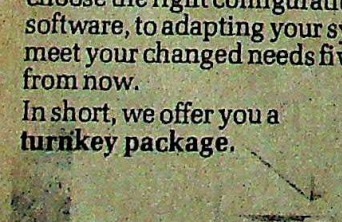
There will be three large fronts. The Left Front will combine the communists and their allies. It will be the most closely knit. The United Front, after absorbing a split in Janata, will forge programmatic linkages with the Left Front. The National Democratic Front will probably not remain what it is now at the time of elections. Whatever the public rhetorical postures, no opposition party will be untouchable for other opposition parties.

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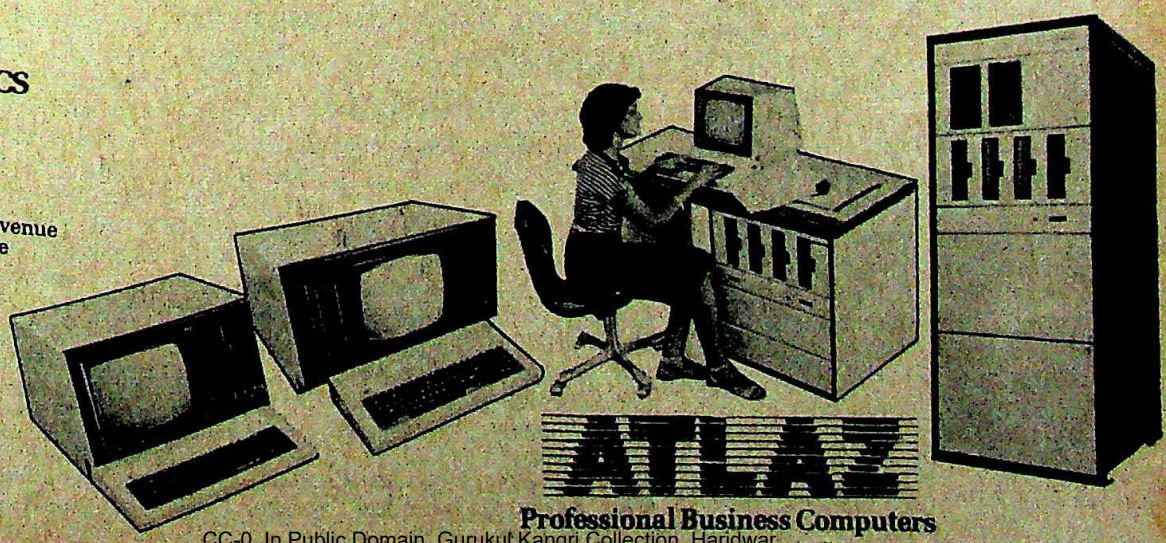
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UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION

Learning the Hard Way

IF MERE reports can improve the nation's ailing higher education system, at least seven central universities are in for a major overhaul. Late last month, a five-member panel headed by Dr Madhuri Shah, 60-year-old chairperson of the University Grants Commission (UGC), submitted its 307-page report on the working of the central universities: Delhi University, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), Banares Hindu University (BHU), North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Hyderabad University, and Vishwa Bharati. Together they account for over 40 per cent of the central outlay of about Rs 200 crore for higher education.

For the first time in the country's academic history, an official study has severely indicted these elite universities for plummeting academic standards, excessive politicisation and proclivity towards regionalism prevalent on their campuses. In its report, the panel says the universities are in a "state of perpetual crisis and are faced with problems some of which are beyond their competence to solve". It goes on to blame administrative inefficiency and tardiness for the sorry situation. On a more constructive note, the panel has made some sweeping recommendations such as a ban on the activities of political parties on the campus, abolition of elected student unions, enforcing a code of conduct for teachers, separation of undergraduate and post-graduate education, and an amendment of laws pertaining to the universities in order to make these institutions more accountable to the people.

The panel, which in addition to Shah has a vice-chancellor and three former vice-chancellors on its board, spent over a year analysing the malaise infecting the central universities. During their visits to the universities, the members discussed relevant issues with over 200 teachers, karamcharis, student leaders and eminent academicians. The panel, which was appointed by the UGC —the main funding body for all universities—examined the general state of discipline in the universities, the causes of periodic disturbances on the campuses, the desirability of evolving a code of conduct for political parties with a view to preventing their activity on the campus, and suggested remedial measures for the efficient functioning of central universities.

Vitiated Atmosphere: Says Shah: "What hurts me most is that we are not getting the maximum out of these universities due to extraneous factors. I have brought it to the notice of both the prime minister and the education minister that if we want to do justice to higher education and the country, we must provide an atmosphere which is conducive to learning. At the moment, the whole atmosphere is highly politicised." Shah and her colleagues got a taste of that, first-hand. Even before the panel began its work, it encountered resistance from the university community which tried to deny it access to various documents and records in AMU, BHU and NEHU. Despite repeated requests, basic information on subjects like the detailed procedure for admissions of students and recruitment of teachers were not given.

The main findings of the report are that:

► none of the central universities has been able to maintain an all-India character. For instance, the majority of students at JNU are from Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa. Others like AMU, BHU which earlier had a national character have become very regionalist in the composition of their staff and students;

► academic standards of these universities have declined. Courses and programmes have remained to a large extent traditional and unimaginative, with no excitement about learning and no thrust towards innovation and enterprise;

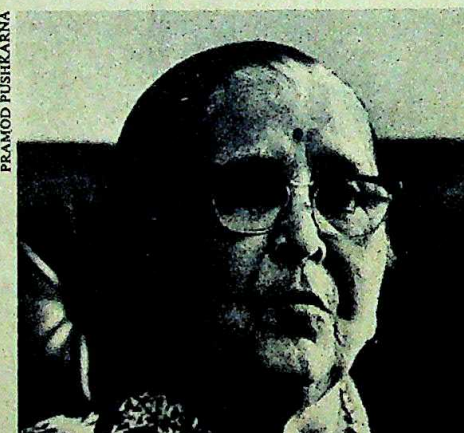
► though universities are packed with research scholars, none of them has a [illegible] body to coordinate research and relate it to the nation's problems;

► the academic atmosphere of these campuses is far from satisfactory as a result of pressure politics, indiscipline and often [illegible] lessness;

► universities have become highly politicised and have failed to achieve the objectives for which they were established;

► and, the recruitment of teachers has been irregular in various universities.

The panel has criticised all the universities for losing their national character by admitting only local students, often under duress. For instance, eight students out of 10 in Delhi University, seven out of 10 in BHU, eight out of 10 in AMU, and three out of 10 in JNU are either from the state where they are situated, or from neighbouring states. In BHU, 82.6 per cent of the students admitted during 1978-79 were from Uttar Pradesh alone, 9.3 per cent from adjacent states, Bihar, and only 6.1 per cent from other states. Even in the matter of recruitment, the universities have chosen local teachers. For example, during 1976-81, 93 per cent of the professorships and 90 per cent of the readerships in AMU were filled by local candidates, and 84 per cent of the lecturers were appointed from amongst the temporary lecturers and research scholars of the same university. In the case of Vishwa Bharati University, 78 per cent of the lecturers, 66 per cent of the professors and 66 per cent of the readers were from West Bengal alone.



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

"What hurts me most is that we are not getting the maximum out of these universities due to extraneous factors. At the moment the whole atmosphere is highly politicised."

—Dr Madhuri Shah, chairman, UGC



Teachers and students agitate before the UGC office: spirited resistance

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of all the Central universities the panel has taken JNU particularly to task for adopting a lopsided admission policy, and has put the blame squarely on the university for irregularities in admissions. While lauding the principles of giving weightage to economic, social and regional deprivation in admissions, the report reveals its misuse as well. It charges: "The certificate required in support of economic and other deprivations were obtained by the students or others for the benefit of the candidates coming from the states in which they belonged... and the university did not take any active steps to verify them." The report has recorded that it was JNU's carelessness in the past that led to false admissions and eventually contributed to the disturbances in the university.

A considerable number of JNU's students in fact have connections with political parties, particularly leftist ones like the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist party of India-Marxist (CPI-M). Last year's agitations, due to which the university had to be closed down for over one-third of the academic session, have been attributed to the excessive politicisation of the campus. It was after a long-drawn battle that JNU's new Vice-Chancellor P.N. Shrivastava adopted a region-proof admission policy.

The panel has expressed apprehension about major trouble in NEHU as well. According to its findings, the university has assumed a purely regional character as far as enrolment in post-graduate classes is concerned, and there are signs of inter-tribal tensions which may lead to serious consequences. Says the report: "In our meeting with the students who come from Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram, it was impressed upon us by all the three groups that they have been brought together and were forced to live together in spite of different cultures because there is a design to create tensions amongst them."

The report has not spared the teachers, either. In fact, the panel has held the teaching community responsible for the majority of academic woes. "There are a few cases where teachers have directly disrupted university work which led to either paralysing the academic work on campus or closure of the university," says the report.

Concerned about the prevailing rot in the universities, the panel has recommended that a code of conduct be formulated for both students and teachers. It has suggested that on their part, teachers should engage classes regularly, and if they are elected to Parliament, or state assemblies, they should take leave for the duration of their stay in the legislatures and conduct their political activities only outside the campus. Secondly, teachers should not incite any section of the university to resort to strikes or violence, and finally that students should not indulge in activities like gheraos, destruction of university property, or disruption of normal academic life.

Determined Stand: If the report is any indication, the UGC seems determined to ensure at least a semblance of academic peace in the campus. Explains Shah: "I am all for encouraging academic environment in the universities for which the UGC will give liberal finances. The only thing I want from the teachers is that they take their classes regularly, come prepared for lectures and spend less time and money on politics and elections. We mean business this time." She has requested all the vice-chancellors to implement the panel's recommendations as soon as possible, and has also set up a monitoring cell within the UGC to review the progress of implementation. Predicts a UGC official: "The strange notion that democracy and autonomy means a free-for-all during an agitation, or disrupting teaching, and defacing and damaging property, is to be dispelled once for all."

Some vice-chancellors, who have had quite enough of the growing indiscipline in their campuses, have welcomed the recommendations of the panel. Says Dr Gurubux Singh, vice-chancellor of Delhi University: "Some of the UGC recommendations are very good and they should be implemented. We are studying other proposals which will be placed before the various bodies of the universities for approval and opinion." But other top-ranking academicians are dissatisfied with the report for ignoring the collegiate education which seems to be a major source of trouble. Commenting on the fact that the panel has not studied the problems of individual colleges, Mohinder Singh, dean of colleges of Delhi University, says: "It is unfortunate that the UGC has not given enough emphasis on college development. Colleges account for three-fourths of the university system, and nothing can improve if we don't improve the colleges."

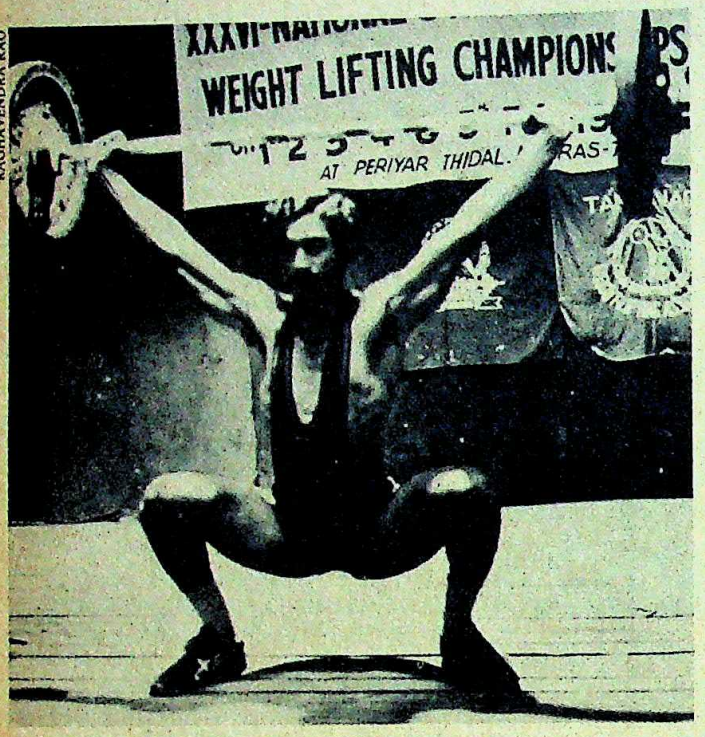
Strong Resistance: The report has, however, faced strong opposition from the teachers, students and karamcharis who believe its implementation will curb their freedom, the autonomy of the universities, and ultimately lead to bureaucratisation of university education. Last fortnight saw a massive demonstration outside the UGC's office in New Delhi, organised by students and teachers of both JNU and Delhi University. Complains Murali Manohar Prashad Singh, president of the Delhi University Teachers Association: "The committee is attempting to destroy the already eroding autonomy of the universities and would crush the democratic movements of teachers, karamacharis and students." And adds Rashmi Doraiswamy, president, JNU Students Union: "It is ironic that the report has put the entire blame for the unplanned growth (in terms of admissions) of the universities on teachers and karamcharis when the fact is that it is the university authorities who are responsible for all the corruption and bungling."

A meeting of student and teacher representatives of all the central universities has been called for next month, to chalk out a plan of action. Warns Anil Soni, president of the Delhi University Students Union: "If Mrs Shah wants to curb the genuine democratic activities of the students by banning unions, she is in for trouble. We will not allow the university authorities to be party to the dictatorial designs of the UGC." Evidently, the report is likely to rouse the very kind of activity in campuses that it has vowed to eliminate.

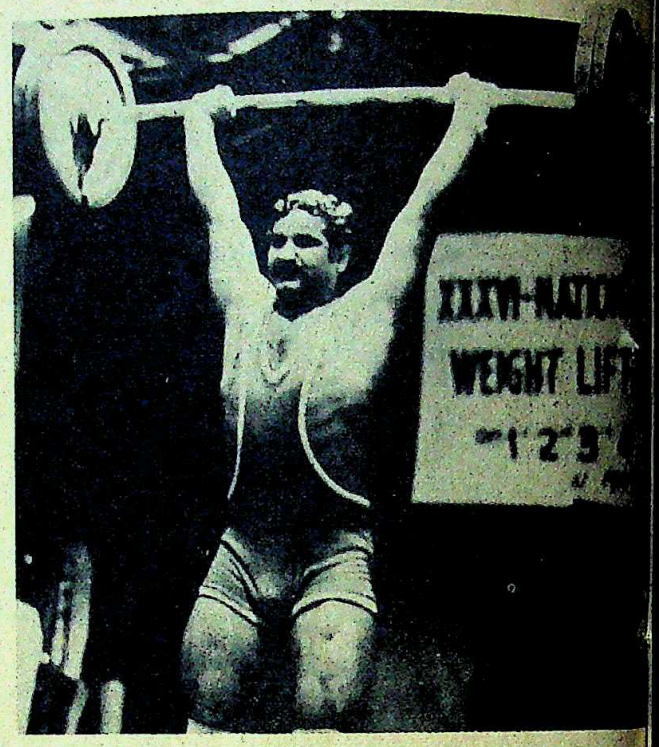
—PRABHU CHAWLA

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RAGHAVENDRA RAO



Champion lifters Sekhar (left) and Meher Chand: overcoming heavy odds

WEIGHTLIFTING

Stronger Showing

SATHVACHAR is a modest little settlement near Vellore in Tamil Nadu, with a population of about 10,000. Despite its size, the village occupies a unique niche in Indian weightlifting: it boasts of no less than four gymnasiums and has over the years furnished the country with some of its most successful strongmen. Last fortnight, Sathvachar was back in the news at the 36th national weightlifting championships in Madras when its alumni strained and heaved their way to a string of national records. V. Sekhar took the featherweight crown with a national record total of 250 kg. K. Mohindran, who had won the junior national flyweight title only a few months ago, bagged the flyweight trophy here with a brilliant effort that placed him 15 kg ahead of the runner-up. And G. Devan in the 56 kg class was the only lifter to emerge with new records in both the snatch and jerk events.

The feats of the Sathvachar trio were the highlight of a tournament that was an important milestone for the sport. No less than 21 national records bit the dust, a very satisfying improvement on the performance at the Asiad which had seen 15 national records bettered. Says G. Rajkumar, a coach trained at the Patiala sports institute: "I would say that good training provided over a long period before the Asiad and the heavy workload exacted by the Bulgarian coach and also the tough competition that our lifters went through in the Asiad have made them hardy and powerful."

Vast Improvement: Nowhere were the bulging muscles more evident than in the feats of Meher Chand, the powerfully built and soft-spoken 30-year-old army havildar who was declared the best lifter of the meet. The Rajasthan stalwart competed in the 90 kg group, and set a new national record total of 300 kg, bettering by 5 kg the earlier mark of 295 kg set by Vispi Daroga. Chand had thus acquired enough strength and technique over the last two years to be able to lift a hefty 27.5 kg more, a creditable performance by any standards.

But the lifter who faced the toughest competition was undoubtedly the slim and wiry Sekhar. For one, he had to match snatch for snatch and jerk for jerk with four other internationals, including the redoubtable Tamilselvan—who at the Asiad had become the only Indian ever to snatch a weight twice his bodyweight. What made Sekhar's record all the more creditable was the fact that he had moved from fly to bantam to featherweight class. In fact, to get into that class he had had to shed 2 kg during the meet, which meant that he had almost to starve himself. Commented Railways coach Thiruvengadam: "It is no joke to come out champion in such a tough field. And to break a record by no less a lifter than Tamilselvan was remarkable indeed."

The tournament had its disappointment. In the 110 kg class, 'Tiger' Tan[illegible] who won two bronze medals at the [illegible] was clearly out of form. His jerk effort [illegible] kg was a woeful 30.5 short of his [illegible] record of 195.5 kg.

Weighty Tussle: However, the [illegible] plus class turned up trumps. Balwinder Singh and Neville Daroga fought it out for the title of the strongest man of the meet. It all began when Balwinder snatched 140 kg to break Daroga's record of 137.5 kg. Daroga came up with a muscle-twisting effort that enabled him to equal Balwinder's new record. His rival replied with lifts of 142.5 and then 145 kg. An exhausted Daroga had no answer to that. In the jerk, too, Daroga couldn't keep up with Balwinder—ending up managing 182.5 kg while the other went through with 185 kg to aggregate 327.5 kg, bettering Daroga's record by 2.5 kg.

Four-time Commonwealth gold medallist Karunakaran drew some shrewd conclusions when the tournament ended. "In the speed events of fly, bantam and feather, that India can do well in international weightlifting. Maybe it is because we mature longer than the westerners and our lifters can fit into these classes even when they are well out of their teens. But when westerners reach their teens they are too heavy for these classes." It is gratifying to know that even in a sport where muscle power is all, India could make a lasting mark.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI with RAJIV

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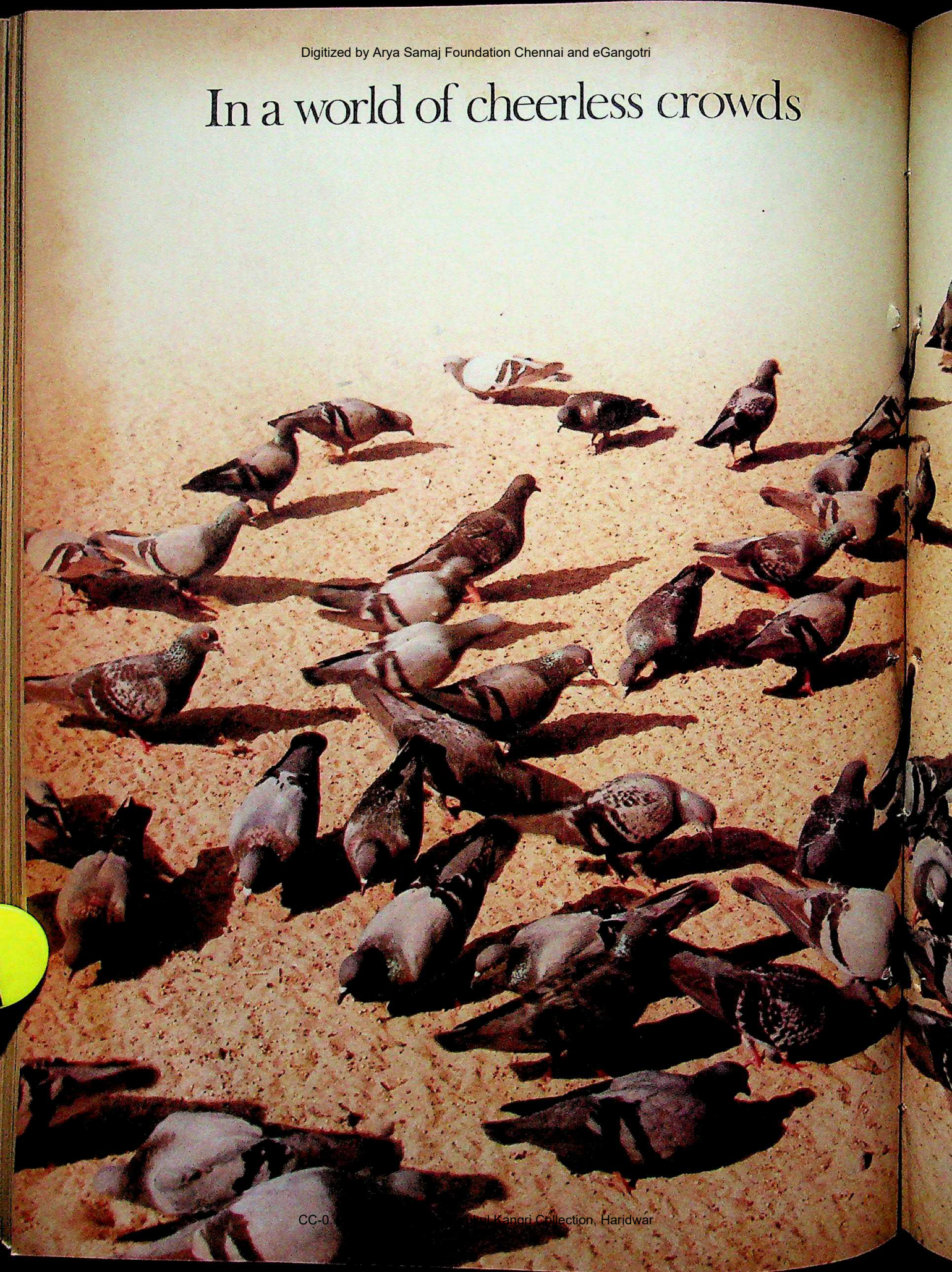
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SUZUKI

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In a world of cheerless crowds



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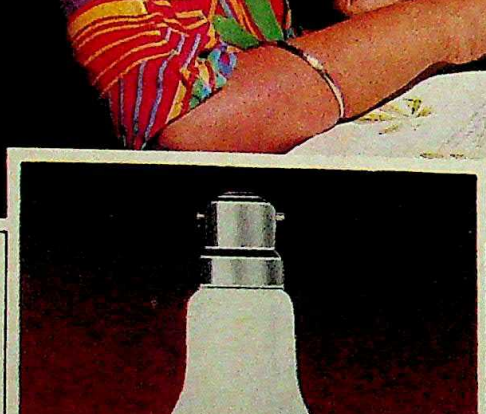
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CALCUTTA

Power to the People

THE THICKLY populated industrial area of Gouribari in north Calcutta has long had the dubious reputation of being a haven for antisocials. Marauding gangs forcibly extorted money; smuggling, breaking into railway wagons and illicit distillation had come to be accepted as a sordid fact of everyday life of the middle and working class people of the area. But on Republic Day this year, the terrorised residents in a defiant show of solidarity finally made a desperate effort to break the mafia rule. In the face of a massive public appeal from residents, police were left with no option but to arrest the kingpins of gangs operating in the area, including Hemen Mondal the most prominent gang leader who is known for his close links with a section of the Congress(I).

Immediately after Mondal was arrested, prominent Congress(I) leaders issued a statement describing the arrest as another instance of Marxist attacks on members of their party. However, since then the party leaders have remained silent realising that supporting a man like Mondal did their image little good. But it still made clear the kind of political patronage that Mondal and his men enjoyed.

Since the arrests, law-keeping operations in the entire area have virtually become the responsibility of the newly-formed vigilante Peace Committee whose members take turns patrolling the streets at night. During the day, the committee is engaged in holding meetings and issuing pamphlets asking people to "shake off your fears of goondas and build up resistance."

Inspiring Example: Gouribari's example seems to have inspired other localities. Peace committees are now being formed in other adjoining areas with the same purpose. Says a resident of Ballygunge, in south Calcutta: "Ever since the Gouribari incident became known, the gang leaders in our locality have also been lying low." Further, the general belief that the police are in league with antisocial elements gained strength from none other than Chief Minister Jyoti Basu. Last fortnight, Basu made public the claim that a section of the police were hand in glove with known law-breakers and ordered a thorough inquiry.

The Gouribari mass movement was sparked off by an incident that epitomised the fear under which residents lived. Four young men entered a local cinema theatre after an altercation with ticket blackmarketeers. While the show was in progress, a gang of hoodlums barged into the theatre, dragged the youngsters outside and beat them up. As news of the incident spread, the men, women and children of Gouribari came out onto the streets in hundreds to protest against such blatant and recurring gangsterism. When the police arrived on the scene, Gouribari witnessed the unprecedented sight of police being goaded by hundreds of women into arresting Hemen Mondal, who they claimed was the leader of the gang preying on the community.



Anti-Mondal graffiti: breaking the mafia hold

Mondal's story reads like a crime thriller. The son of a well-to-do businessman, he was an early school drop-out, soon getting embroiled in street fights and organised crime. At one point he was accused of murdering a police constable. He absconded for a while, was later arrested, but released finally at the intervention of a prominent local Congress leader who was a minister in the state Government between 1972 and 1977.

Emboldened by his release, Mondal organised a gang and went on a rampage forcing innocent residents to part with their money in the name of donations. Said a local housewife, Gita Saha: "On each Jagadhatri Puja day, Hemen and his cohorts would organise blood donation camps and sell the donated blood. Out of fear people had to donate blood and if anybody refused, they used to drag him to the camp. He would also organise community Durga and Kali Puja and distribute subscription vouchers to every household with the amount written on them which people had no other option but to pay. We had to pay Rs 151 on each of these occasions even though we could hardly afford it."

Grim Battle: Gita's neighbour, Saraswati had a grimmer story to tell. Her husband, Abhijit, was dragged out of the house one morning and mercilessly beaten up because he refused to furnish Hemen's men with the information they had sought about the political affiliations of his friends. Said she: "He returned home in a half-dead condition and initially it was even difficult to get a doctor, as none dared enter the area. He had to stay in bed for six months."

A marked feature of life in Gouribari these days is the readiness with which the residents speak about their harrowing experiences. Said Ram Swaroop Thakur, priest of the nearly 100-year-old Swetamber Jain Temple: "The time has come to shake off our fears. These goondas had forcibly occupied the guest-rooms of our temple and every night they used to organise drinking sessions here, desecrating the temple by eating meat and fish which they would catch from our own tank. There was none to whom we could turn with our complaints." Satyanarayan Ghosh, proprietor of Abhaya Industries, said he had to oblige Hemen's boys "first with my own television set and later on with a brand-new one".

When a search was conducted at the Jain temple guest-house and at Mondal's residence on the orders of the commissioner of police, and at the insistence of the local people, it yielded a large amount of booty including air-conditioners, stolen railway equipment, Rs 70,000 in cash, a number of bank documents and various other items.

Today armed policemen guard the basement of the nearby Aurobindo Setu which the gang had allegedly turned into a godown. Said a Home Department officer: "If people had brought the situation to our notice earlier then we could have taken action."

Even though police pickets guard the streets of Gouribari, residents have little faith in the constabulary. The peace committee is warning residents of their and neighbouring areas "to stand by the people of Gouribari to rid society of antisocials"—a timely reminder that Mondal's political connections could lead to his early release and consequently, a thirst for revenge.

—SUMANTA SEN

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At a time when everybody in computers is busy playing musical chairs, will you stop still for just a few moments to consciously and carefully decide what shape you want your career to take?

The next five years are going to be the most turbulent the computer industry has seen in India. Everything's in a state of flux. While new companies have been mushrooming all over, there are not enough trained and qualified people to go around.

The name of the game is musical chairs. And every day the pace hots up further. Every day there are ads in the papers, each computer company vying with the others in luring people away. Here today, gone tomorrow is the order of the day.

The irony is that in the most exciting technological field available today, most computer companies offer little else but routine, repetitive and merely adaptive work. Men and women of promise are quickly disenchanted, disillusioned and unhappy despite hefty salaries. There is no challenge in the job and they perceive the truth in the platitude 'money alone is not enough'.

If you've reached the point where you feel that money is certainly essential but not enough, you may find what CMC has to say and offer, interesting and worthwhile. Perhaps even persuasive enough to make you re-think matters and your goals.

A word about ourselves

Let's face it, it's no secret that CMC is a government organisation. It's even less of a secret that CMC cannot offer the highest salaries in the business. Yet CMC attracts some of the finest talent in the field.

Again, it's no secret that over the years, several people have left CMC. (It's the same with every other computer company.) It's even less of a secret that a great number of them have wanted to come back within a few months. Sometimes within days

While we are one of the few companies in the world which maintains 22 international brands of systems, we are into far more than just maintenance. We are a one-point support organisation involved in every aspect of computers: software development, systems consultancy, computer centres, research and development, training programmes and so on.

How good we are at our job can be guaged by the fact that we were asked to plan, steer and execute the multi-million dollar UN-funded project 'Interact'. Working with professionals from Indonesia, Tanzania, Yugoslavia and other developing countries, 'Interact' is developing and systems engineering real time, dedicated systems for power system management, railway freight management and meteorological forecasting.



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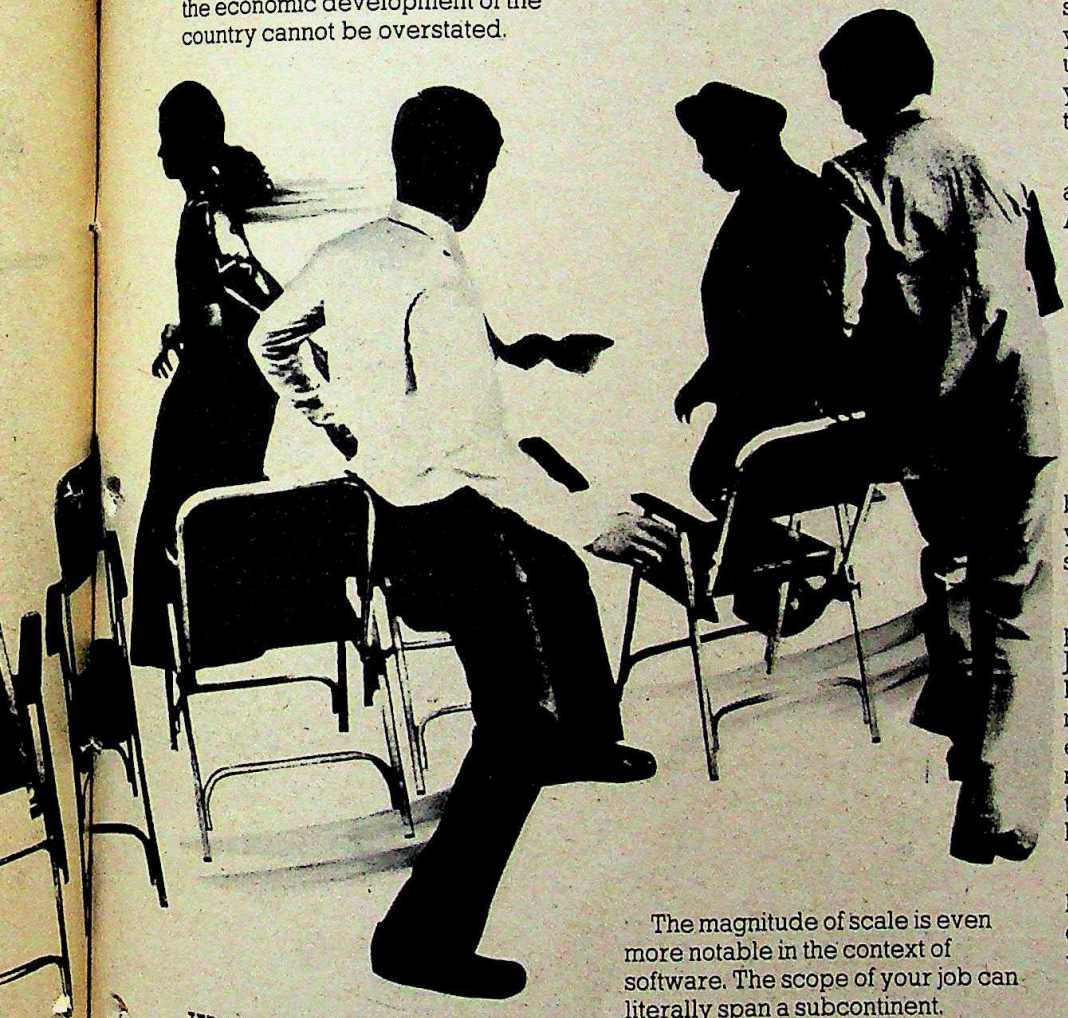
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Magnum opus: Project 'Indonet'

On the heels of 'Interact', CMC has been asked to undertake perhaps the most challenging job in the field of computer-aided applications in India.

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Our hardware engineers have the opportunity to work on the very latest systems like Cyber 730, Data General MV 8000, Burroughs 6800, DEC 10, Univac 1160, not just in India, but in various foreign countries.
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Well, what is the nature and size of the job CMC can offer you?

Most computer companies ask whether you are big enough and bright enough for the job. The relevant question is, is the job big, bright and challenging enough for you?

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The magnitude of scale is even more notable in the context of software. The scope of your job can literally span a subcontinent.
At CMC you will get a chance to develop the software for railway freight operations management, railway passenger reservations, electric power distribution, meteorology etc. that could affect the whole of India. You could design systems software in the areas of data base, graphics, communications, compilers and CAD/CAM.
Exploit advanced languages like Pascal and C in an Unix environment. And work with the latest IBM 4300 or compatible series and VAX 11/750 systems.

Burn a little brighter

Is that all? We've given you an idea of the hard, tangible facts about CMC. But frankly if technological facilities was all there was to CMC, we would be a nice, slick, super-competent modern organisation which turns in profits every year and no more. Fortunately CMC is a little more than that.

CMC is special, very special because it has a unique call-it-what-you-will climate, environment, ambiance. It's like ozone. It exercises your brains, stretches your abilities and dares you to be original. It continually underscores the fact that the more you exploit your potential, the more there is of it.

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What kind of computer professionals are we looking for? Just about every kind of specialist in R and D, hardware, software or marketing. Whether you are an experienced hand or raw doesn't make a difference. The only thing that does is how good you are and how much you expect from yourself.

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SEX CHANGE

Agony and Ecstasy



SUDHASAPTWA BASU

Once I had made up my mind to go through with it, I was determined to see I did not crumble. It was like coming out of jail, of suddenly freeing myself.

SEX CHANGE operations, increasingly common in the West, are not unknown in India. Several cases in recent years have come to light of men driven by an inner conviction to become women. Most often it is a deep-rooted confusion of gender, as opposed to physiological confusion, that leads transsexuals to complex surgery that will refit them for a new role. The male organs, in such a case, after extensive hormonal treatment are surgically removed and replaced with female genitals. But there are other cases where the sexual discrepancy itself is in question (see box). It isn't clear till the person grows up whether it possesses male or female genitalia—and in fact cannot be classified hermaphrodite either. Medical opinion has only lately enough advanced to differentiate and correct such errors—and the victim burdened by nature's deformity is often doomed to live an agonising life in the penumbra of blurred sexual identity.

One such case is the story of "Vijay" (a pseudonym), a 23-year-old senior executive in a five-star hotel in New Delhi, who had recently transformed himself into "Ayesha". Medically she has not altered her sex. But her gender has changed—she belongs now to a sex other than what she was brought up to believe. Growing up as a boy, she did not realise she belonged to the other sex till she was 16 and began to menstruate. European doctors advised the use of male hormones, to reduce the shock of the sudden discovery that Vijay possessed ovaries and a uterus. Her actual organ wasn't male at all—it was what she today calls "an overgrowth".

For six long years she lived with the agony, her fears compounded by the trauma of her social situation. Loved by her parents, appreciated by her employers and belonging socially to the upper class, the courage required for a total transformation was all the greater. "Ayesha" has done it; today she is a ravishing young woman, bristling with a confidence that is almost defiant. Her story serves as an example to others, who suffering like her, are inhibited by social ostracism, to lead the life they were made for. Here are excerpts from "Ayesha's" story in her own words as told to Principal Correspondent PRABHA DUTT.

AS A young lad in the all-boys public school in Simla, I did have effeminate looks but was never knocked around or teased. I sailed through the school years hating games, playing female parts in dramatics and went on to a hotel management school, first in Switzerland and then in Austria. Except for the fact that I had a very feminine voice and did not play games I honestly did not think anything was wrong.

It was while I was still training abroad that at the age of sixteen-and-a-half, I started bleeding. When I consulted the doctors it came as a shock—I was essentially a woman

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complete with ovaries and a uterus. All that needed to be done to restore me to full-fledged womanhood, was the removal of an overgrowth with minor surgery. If however I wanted to continue as a male, numerous operations involving the removal of my ovaries and uterus, would have been required.

To help me tide over the shock, it was suggested that I took male hormones for about two weeks while I made up my mind. Actually I did not make up my mind for five long years. For five long years, I kept taking male hormone injections and developed facial hair like other young adolescent boys. The menstruation stopped and for all purposes I remained Vijay.

I landed myself a job as a senior executive in a hotel in Delhi. It was then that I developed a split personality. I was so scared I would be discovered. I could not even tell my mother—how could I?—the same mother who had bathed me. My reactions were all that of a woman's, but I was afraid and I kept on wondering whether I would have the confidence to face society.

When I felt attracted to a man I would chide myself. All I could think was that he would think me a homosexual. Everytime I dated other girls I felt like screaming from the roof-top that I was a woman. I realised very soon I could not go on. Every time I went into a men's locker-room I felt it was a horrifying experience.

My mother would go shopping, buy a beautiful sari or a Jamavar shawl and say "This is for your wife." So many times I picked up the courage to tell her and so many times I failed. I saw others using make-up and felt an urge to put it on too, but how could I? The one year that I was abroad, I did talk things over with some people. But it was worse when I was back. I was with my dear ones and could not tell them anything.

A few years later, however, I developed severe knee trouble and was told that doctors in Australia could attend most effectively to the knee ailment. I flew down. They had one look at me and told me that it was all because of the hormones I was taking and I would have to put a stop to that. It was the most crucial period for me. I realised I could not carry on and should have taken the step long before. I sat down and wrote to my parents—telling them that I was really a woman. I stopped taking male hormones.

Within two months, I was back to being a complete woman. I flew down to Singapore where a team of doctors including a psychologist examined me and declared I was fit to be a woman. My parents came down and the necessary surgery was carried out. I had precisely two sittings with the psychologist. The rest of the adjustment was mine. Once I had made up my mind to go through with it, I was determined to see I did not crumble. It was like coming out of the jail, of suddenly freeing myself.

Back in Delhi the unstinted support of my parents, friends and employers have helped tide me through. My employers even offered me the option of moving to another city. But I realised I had run away once and could not keep running away. I grew my jet black hair, purchased all the silk saris I had wanted to and one fine day, when good and ready, just coolly walked into the hotel.

Both my work and looks have helped in the rehabilitation. Even my friends thought that somehow it was all wrong before. For those who had seen me before, it is easier to accept me as a woman. Of course there are still problems, like having to get a fresh passport, a new insurance policy, staying out late on dates—but nobody dares say anything which would embarrass me—the curiosity and the stares of visitors at home who do not know what to say but whom my mother puts at once at ease by pointing out that they (my parents) deserve congratulations and not condolences. There are some minor problems too, like what to do with my old wardrobe. I will probably make a bonfire or give it to a jumble sale.

Sex Switch

WHY IS it that the sex of a person is not always quite what it seems? What are the factors that create this confusion and make life for such people like "Ayesha", a traumatic experience. According to Dr Kamal Bakshee, associate professor of gynaecology and obstetrics at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, even though there are five factors which determine the sex of the person, it is generally determined by looking only at the external organs. Bakshee elaborating the five as: "...chromosomes—in a male being XY and in the female XX; gonadal manifestation—ovaries producing ova and the testes secreting sperm; internal organs—uterus and fallopian tubes in the female and epididymis and vas in a male; the external organs—vagina, labia majora, labia minora, clitoris in a female and the penis in a male and lastly the psychological makeup of the person."

Bakshee referred to three kinds of abnormalities which could hide the true sex of a baby for many years. "If the mother takes some particular hormonal drugs during pregmancy, or if she has a functional ovarian tumour or an adrenal glandular condition called hyperplasia, the child may be born with a small penis but otherwise may have ovaries and a uterus. In the second condition, the child may have a testis not easily discernible, no penis and hence be mistaken for a female but actually have no ovaries. In the third category are the really rare cases of persons who have developed organs of both male and female, like one ovary and testis or even half an ovary and half a testis. These are 'true' hermaphrodites."

In the 15 years Bakshee has been practising, she has had to deal with three cases in the latter category and about 25, which fell into the former. She recalled a case of an individual brought up as a male, who switched to being a female, got married but unfortunately her husband fell in love with another woman and divorced her.

Personal Trauma: Talking about the dilemmas of trying to live normal lives, Dr I.N. Tiwari, plastic surgeon at the Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) Hospital said: "It is easier to help a person to live as a female. But if despite the fact that the person is predominantly female, he prefers to live as a male because he has been brought up as such and is afraid to face society, it is much more difficult."

Tiwari cited a case reported by the press of Ramu alias Ramesh Sharma who works in a factory and lives in the doctor's house. Abandoned by his parents at the age of 11, he worked as a domestic servant in a house for sometime. Though told that his organs could not develop fully because he had been butted by a bullock, he discovered he was menstruating at the age of 14. Ramu managed to keep his secret to himself till he was 18, but then he developed an ovarian cyst and had to be brought to JP Hospital.

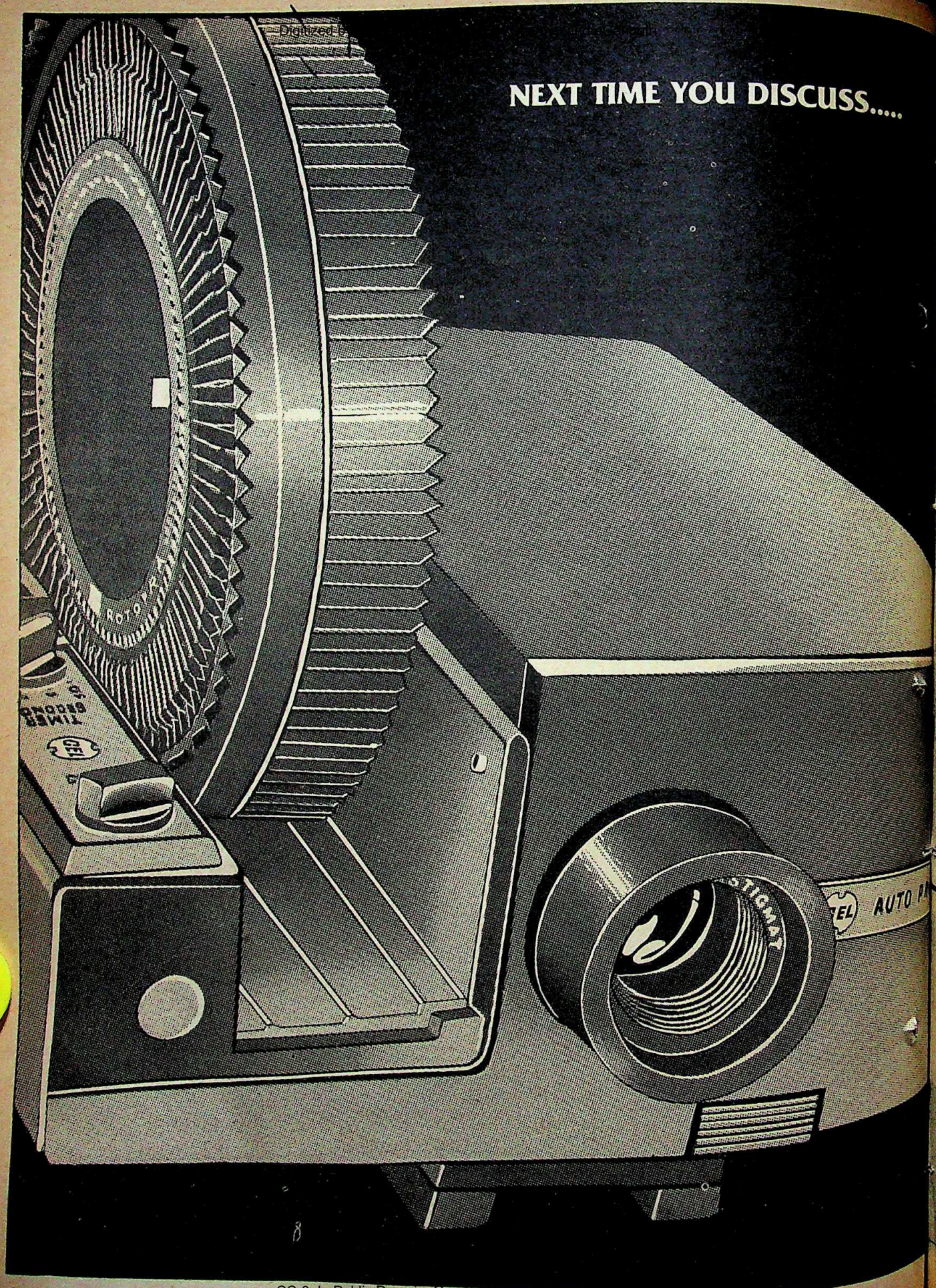
The cyst was mistaken for a distended bladder and a catheter was inserted. It was much later that it was discovered that he had one ovary and uterus. But by the time it was too late. "The ovaries were full of pus and had to be removed, I had to perform 11 operations in different stages to make him a man. Today he can lead a normal married life but will not be able to produce children," said Tiwari.

Life doesn't seem easy for these people. Both Bakshee and Tiwari feel it is important for them to come out and be helped by doctors and others around them to lead normal lives. Even then the going may be difficult, for the process of adjusting is not always easy.

—PRABHA DUTT

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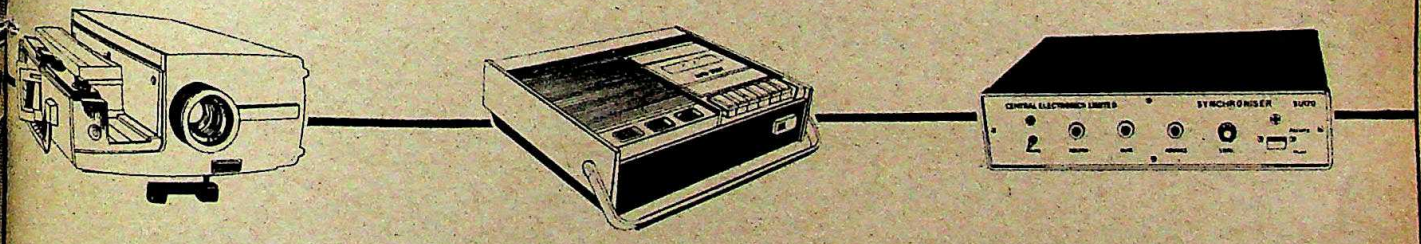
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Making sense of science

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AMJAD ALI KHAN

Consummate Virtuoso

AS THE lights in the hall begin to dim, Amjad Ali Khan swathed in a toosh shawl and accompanied by the tabla maestro, the young Zakir Husain, picks his way carefully through the press of admirers and students assembled on the two sides of the stage and sits before his sarod that lies gleaming in the glare of the stage lights. The sounds of thunderous clapping rise in waves from the dark hall. The Khan Saheb is a handsome man with that fine join of nose and brow that shows his Afghan ancestry, his hair carefully disarranged, a Hans Holbein figure in the flesh.

From the first touch of the coconut shell plectrum in *Abhogi Kanada*'s alap section, Amjad is the consummate virtuoso at once in command of the instrument and yet relaxed enough to make it sing. The eyes are half closed and often an unconscious smile or a frown changes the serene abstraction of his face. For his size, Amjad has extraordinarily large hands that could span two octaves had he trained to be a pianist. And those hands could be remarkably delicate one moment with an ethereal *Komal Gandhara* high up in the stratosphere of his sarod and in the next produce the percussive detonation of a fight of taans that scatter like confetti in every direction of space and time. His music seems more felt than played flowing out in great rushes of warm lyrical sound. By the time the Khan Saheb and the smiling Zakir Husain arrive at a selection of *Mishra Kafi* and *Bhatialis*, the rapport between the stage and the audience is so strong that people are humming along and shouting for *Durga* and *Darbari*.

Memorable Art: R.C. Boral describing Amjad Ali Khan's music at a baithak in Calcutta a year before his death called it the "warmth, the tenderness and the radiance of his tone, a youthful vernal air, that makes Amjad's art memorable". This statement particularly strikes those who have heard the Khan Saheb in his teens, 20 years ago—that same sound which had been almost formed by then and which today at the age of 38 continues to be the signature of his style.

While in sequence and chronology he is of the same generation as Ravi Shankar, Amjad tired early of the concert format inherited by his generation. "The long alap," says Amjad, "drains the performer emotionally, so that the actual meat of the recital which is the composition suffers." Amjad believes that the two-hour-long single raga alap, the lengthened exposition, is what has alienated a whole generation from Hindustani classical music. The easy going syrupy ghazal, the ho-ho school of the cinema is the result. According to the late Sunil Bose: "This problem is as much a facet of the changing times as is the competence of the performer. There is too much music everywhere. The radio, the phonograph, the transistor travel with you and the TV makes everything visual. In my childhood music was rarely heard except when you actually went to hear a concert. At other times there was a blessed silence. Today no one yearns for the very sound of music unless it is significant and compelling. A performer cannot vouch for the attention of any one in front of him except that he makes quick sense."

RAGHU RAI



Amjad Ali Khan: making the sarod sing

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"It is a question of perception and will always be controversial," say the Dagar brothers, "for instance when we perform we make no concessions to the listener whether here or abroad. It is better, we believe, to raise the level of the audience rather than to play to their level."

Musical Tradition: Amjad's pedigree is no less than that of the legendary Mian Tansen who was the court musician of the Emperor Akbar. Known today as Gwalior's Senia gharana its chief instrumental representative was Amjad's father and their guru was the late Ustad Hafiz Ali Khan. "The length of a concert depends on the way you treat the raga," says Kumar Gandharva, himself the doyen of the Gwalior style of gayaki which in his case is original enough to be called his own. "There is no ideal length, except that whatever its length it must make its point and say what it set out to say."

Among the highest paid artistes of India Amjad performs more than a hundred concerts a year, many of them fund-raising exercises for the blind, the spastic and often to the young in schools and colleges. His recent tour of European university campuses such as Heidelberg, Cologne, Frankfurt, Copenhagen and Stockholm when he played to the young seems to have become the pattern of Amjad's life. Says Arif Altaf, a commerce graduate student: "You know where you stand with Amjad Ali Khan, he takes you with him and shows you what you can like in his music." "Amjad's records are among the highest selling records on instrumental music in the industry," says a recording industry spokesman. "It is the arrangement, the direct communicating effort he puts in to make his performance seem easy of access and understanding. He is never remote and difficult or esoteric."

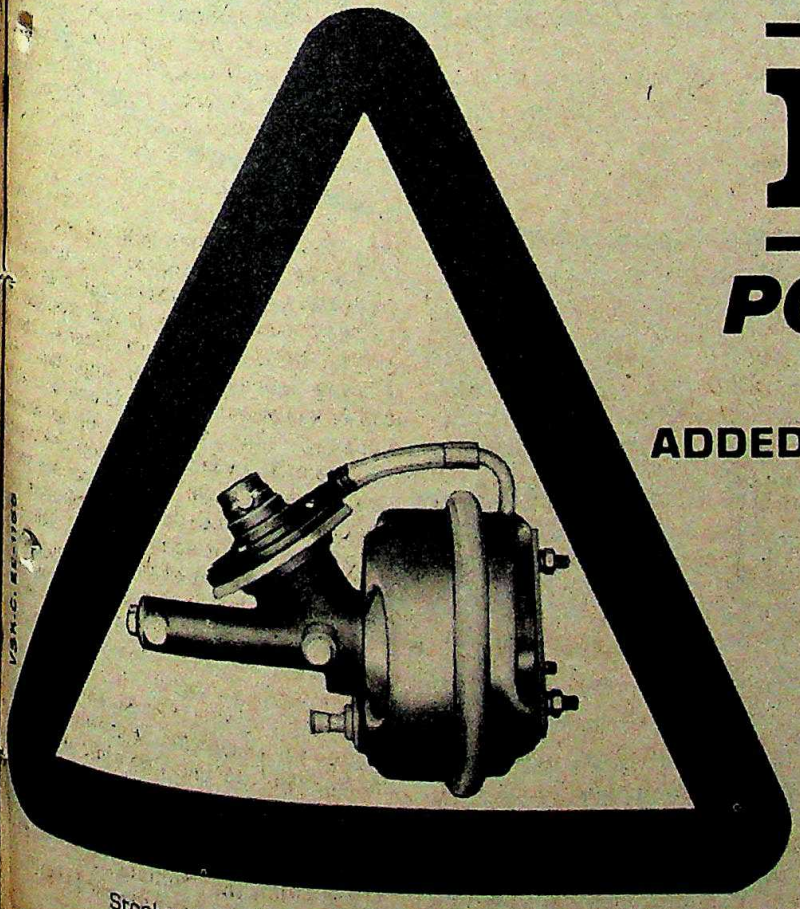
"Ragas are living things and the rasas are what you put into it and not the other way round," says Amjad, "and it is the rasa that communicates with the listener and it is never twice the same."

Raga Technique: Amjad believes that the bandish or the composition is the raga's true life and meaning. "So that if a performer only plays the mukhda and makes that his song, he makes the raga a paraplegic. It puts the raga in a wheelchair." So when the Khan Saheb performs he takes a raga faithfully through both its movements carefully describing every nook and cranny of the song before he launches on the improvisations. "Amjad's gayaki technique is in every lineament his father's", says Krishna Rao Pandit the most respected of Gwalior gharana's legendary names. Ustad Hafiz Ali Khan too liked the short terse alap "the trim exposition keeping the piece lean and agile".

Amjad firmly believes that it is important for Hindustani classical music to change and adapt concert techniques of presentation to suit our times. "Many singers do this as a matter of course," says Amjad. "The late Ghulam Ali Khan's alaps kept its true place in the whole format. Consider Mallikarjum Mansoor, he goes even further. He dives straight into the piece with no loss of rapture and rivets attention to his performance. A 15-minute recital is not half of a half an hour recital just as a three-foot child is not half a six-foot man. Both are complete in themselves. It is only a difference of scale." "No one is cutting down on the length of a raga intentionally. There is very little time left for the performer as indeed the listener," says Kumar Gandharva. "Time is in short supply. People will enjoy what they can assimilate."

It is the balladeer in Amjad that sings in his sarod, all the *Zila Kafis* and *Bhatialis* and the *Pahadis* of his repertoire whose terminal cadences fade into silence and linger in your ears long after the lights have been put out and the concert hall is empty.

—RAGHAVA MENON



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T. BALASARASWATHI

Curtain Call

SHE WAS perhaps the one person who, more than anyone else, made Bharatanatyam what it is today. And when she died last fortnight at the age of 65, Balasaraswathi had collected every honour that a dancer could hope for: she had been recognised by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, and the Music Academy, Madras; she collected an honorary doctorate from Rabindra Bharati University and even a Padma Bhushan. Says Narayana Menon, the chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi: "Her death is not just the passing away of a great artiste but the passing of an era."

Balasaraswathi was born on May 13, 1918 to a family of devadasis. The tradition of music and dance had been in the family for several generations. One of her ancestors, Papammal, was a musician and dancer in the Tanjore court. Her grandmother Dhannammal was a legendary veena player and her mother Jayammal was also a celebrated musician. But Balasaraswathi herself was born to dance and after initial opposition her family let her do as she wished. Her first performance was at the age of seven in the Kapaleeshwar Amman Temple in Kancheepuram. The crowds gathered to see Dhannamal's granddaughter.

Troubled Career: In a few years Balasaraswathi began to make an impact on the world of dance. But it was not smooth sailing all the way. The connoisseurs celebrated her talents but society scoffed at a woman who dared to make Bharatanatyam a profession.

Later as she grew older her career went into the doldrums. Critics in Madras claimed that she was past her prime. Only the Music Academy and its secretary acknowledged her genius and asked her to perform once a year.

It was at this point that Delhi discovered Balasaraswathi. The renewed interest in her art was prompted mainly by two people —Dutch research scholar Beryl De Zoete and north Indian dancer Ram Gopal. De Zoete saw her dance and was enthralled. She said at the time: "Bala told me she was depressed and no one any longer wanted to see her dance. I remembered the much older dancers in Seville... and the true dance lovers' fidelity to the great exponents of the art, even when they are really old."



After this her fame grew in leaps and bounds. She was acclaimed abroad. She danced in America. Ted Shawn, an authority on dance and a well-known critic, was driven to remark after seeing Balasaraswathi at the Jacob's Pillow festival: "You are in the presence of greatness... this is a historic night."

Natural Grace: Balasaraswathi was not beautiful by any stretch of the imagination. She was tall and big-built but she was not pretty as dancers are supposed to be. But she made up for this with her grace. Said *The Times of India* after her death: "Alone of all she made no compromises, wore no resplendent dresses moulded to her woman's body, and often she sang herself. Her props were her eyes and face and the anklets she wore."

Writing in *Sruti*, K. Chandrasekharan of the Music Academy says: "In the tradition- anchored Bharatanatyam, there has never been a greater exponent of the art.

Despite all the glory and adulation, there was a touch of sadness about Balasaraswathi. For one thing she could not understand the way dance was growing. When she died the *Indian Express* wrote that, "The more Bala saw the dance moving in a direction quite alien to her life the deeper the anguish set in—the more isolated she became." *The Times of India* says: "She was incomparable and incomparably pure. The stage was her temple, and this temple was where she would offer the entirety of her devotion without holding anything back."

—K.N. RAGHAVENDRA RAO

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IODINE DEFICIENCY

Retarded Development

ONE OUT of every 20 children born in 11 populous districts of the sub-Himalayan belt in eastern Uttar Pradesh and northern Bihar is virtually retarded with no hope of recovery. This happens because the mother's body lacked an adequate supply of iodine. This discovery has been made by a group of researchers in the capital's All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) who say they are shocked at what they have found.

So is the international scientific community. This is one front on which even arch-enemies like China and Vietnam find themselves on the same side. The new findings have busted the decades old myth that iodine deficiency—which is common in large parts of India, China, Indonesia, Nepal, Vietnam and some other regions of the world—caused just goitre, an ugly swelling of the thyroid gland in the neck which is, however, no more than a cosmetic problem.

Retarded Babies: The AIIMS researchers have conclusively proved that iodine deficiency in these areas, inhabited by over 125 million people in India alone, has resulted in widespread feeble-mindedness. Says Dr N. Kochupillai, the leader of the AIIMS team: "In the villages we have surveyed so far, 4 to 15 per cent babies are born with thyroxine deficiency that will prevent them from realising their full mental potential."

Adds Kochupillai: "Most of these children just cannot be educated. They will be condemned to making a subsistence as marginal farmers or labourers. Said *The Lancet* editorially, quoting the Indian team's findings: "There is a tendency to equate iodine deficiency with goitre, as mere neck-swelling and a non-urgent issue. How false this impression is."

The scientists have, however, not stopped at just discovering a problem of such wide-ranging consequences. Last fortnight they submitted to the Union Health Ministry the report of their experiment on a programme to arrest the decay by injecting all the women in the region with iodine. This would not only give babies born in future enough iodine for brain development at the foetal stage but will also maintain sufficient quantities of breast milk for three to four years.

The AIIMS team initially gave injections to 10,000 persons and say the experiment has been totally successful. It is on the basis of this report that the Government will make up its mind on the proposal by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) to give iodine to six million women in the reproductive age group at a cost of nearly Rs 6 crore. Nearly 60 per cent of the population in the goitre belt—from Bahraich in Uttar Pradesh to East Champaran in Bihar—are deficient in iodine, besides large numbers in pockets such as Mizoram.

Irreversible Damage: According to medical experts, iodine is necessary in the first three months of pregnancy for adequate development of the foetus. Says Kochupillai: "The medical belief is that the effect of iodine deficiency in the first trimester of pregnancy is irreversible. Yet much of the damage can be undone by giving the child adequate supply of iodine in the first three months after birth. If even this is not done, he will be condemned to feeble-mindedness for the rest of his life."

If goitre is a predominantly Asian problem—with 400 million people in the continent inhabiting goitre-prone regions—much pioneering research in the field has been done in the Third World. While Dr Ramalingaswami was the first to prove the goitre-iodine link with his famous Kangra valley experiments, his student Kochupillai, along with Dr C.S. Pandav, M.M. Godbole and M.G. Karmakar continued the work, aided by new research techniques.

Experts say it was established in the mid-'70s that over 60 per cent people in 11 districts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the sub-Himalayan belt suffered from iodine deficiency. It was also known that besides goitre, this occasionally resulted in cretinism (stunted growth) and in deaf mutes. Says Kochupillai: "But this was very rare. There was in fact no explanation for the compromised mental function of a large section of the population in these regions, a fact that often finds mention in the local folklore."

Important Tests: Two years ago, the researchers began a campaign in the Gonda district of Uttar Pradesh, distributing prepaid envelopes containing filter paper strips to nurses and even untrained *dais* in the villages. They were asked to take a smear of blood on the filter paper just as the umbilical



C.S. PANDAV

A villager afflicted with goitre



C.S. PANDAV

A family with iodine deficiency: widespread feeblemindedness

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card was snipped, write the mother's name and address and send the cover to the AIIMS. For comparison, a similar process was adopted in Alleppey and Quilon districts of Kerala, known to be completely goitre-free and in some localities of Delhi.

The blood smears were examined for the presence of thyroxine, the hormone essential for brain development which the thyroid gland secretes. Of the 3,000 samples from Gonda, over 4 per cent were lacking in this. Even in Delhi, there were a number of thyroxine deficient babies though the frequency was less than one-tenth of that in the endemic regions. Delhi has, incidentally, been declared a goitre-prone region recently.

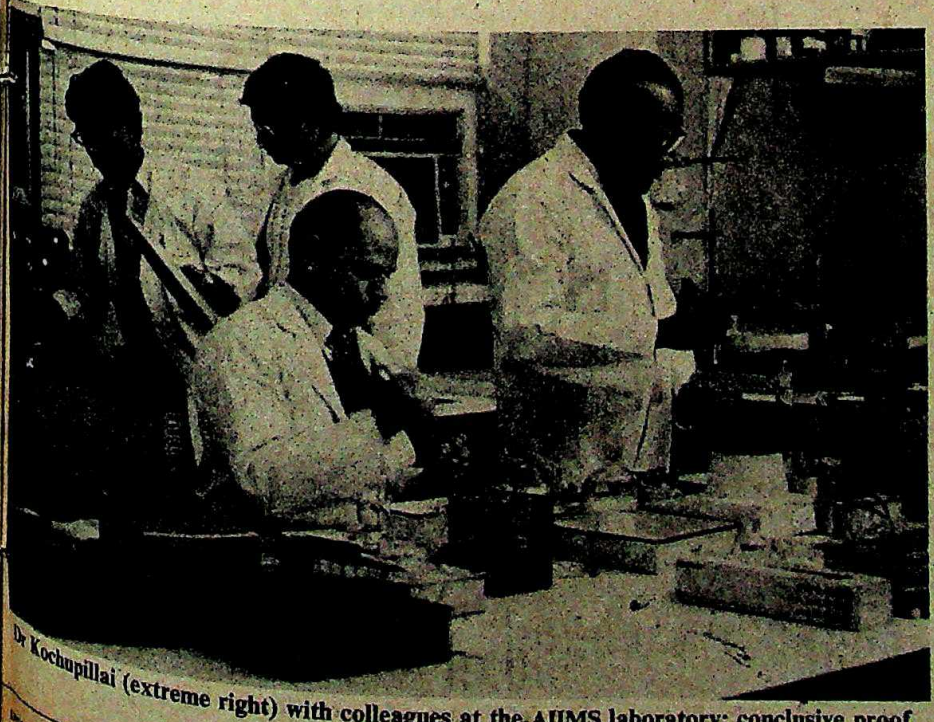
Says Kochupillai: "Ours is incontestable medical evidence and our techniques have proved something that was totally unanticipated." The findings have already been presented at international forums including the Asian Congress of Nutrition at Bangkok in November 1983, where participant nations—Australia, China, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and India—adopted a joint resolution to fight the problem together and to make eradication of iodine deficiency a major component of the 'Health for All by 2000 A.D.' programme.

Essential Food: As in the case of goitre, iodine is the key to eradication of this much graver problem. Ideally, medical experts say, the way out is a complete ban on the sale of unrefined salt. But since that requires building of technical infrastructure for iodisation and a distribution network in far-flung areas, the ICMR-AIIMS group has come up with an alternative to "buy time till a breakthrough is achieved".



C.S. PANDAV

18-year-old Abhayaraj: retarded growth



Dr Kochupillai (extreme right) with colleagues at the AIIMS laboratory: conclusive proof

Under the scheme which has been submitted to the Government, all women in the reproductive age in the iodine-deficient areas will be given a 1 millilitre injection of iodine which would ensure sufficient quantities in their bodies for three to five years. Says Ramalingaswami: "The objective is to save at least the next generation from being condemned to the fate of its predecessors." Adds Kochupillai: "For a developing country like ours, it is absolutely important to protect human resources. We can at least save the coming generations."

While it is presumed that the Union Health Ministry will give the green signal for the programme after evaluating the report on the initial injection experiments submitted last fortnight, experts anticipate help from the UNICEF. In fact, UNICEF had initiated India's National Goitre Control Programme (NGCP) by donating as many as 12 salt iodisation plants.

But the scheme has functioned in fits and starts because of the apathy of the state Governments. Says Dr Pandav: "Of the plants given by the UNICEF two were installed at Gauhati and they never started functioning. Now the UNICEF is offering more plants but we are not in a position to take these as we have not even been able to decide where to instal them."

Bureaucratic Hurdles: The researchers point out other instances of official apathy towards the problem like the "salt commissioner complaining of poor offtake of iodised salt while the country's production falls far short of even one-third of the installed capacity and meets just 16 per cent of the projected demand in the deficient regions". A consequence of this administrative failure has been a spurt in the quack business. In regions with a high rate of deficiency, hundreds of small time clinics peddle iodine paint as a magic cure for the problem.

It helps in a small way as quacks paint goitrous swellings and the body absorbs a bit of the iodine through the skin. But this does not even touch the fringe of the problem as goitre is something people have already learnt to live with. The women even wear ornaments designed to cover neck swellings. The real problem now is feeblemindedness caused by iodine deficiency.

Medical experts explain that with increased deforestation and flooding, iodine is being washed away from the topsoil in increasingly large regions of the country and unless steps are taken now, there will be no way of preventing the birth of an increasing number of retarded children. Ramalingaswami sums it up: "This is not a problem as difficult as small pox to eradicate. We already have the magic bullet in iodine. All we need is the commitment to employ it."

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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On behalf of my colleagues and on my own behalf, I take this opportunity of wishing you a very happy and prosperous New Year.

Whilst 1983 has been a year of problems, especially for tyre industry, due to slackening of demand, galloping raw-material prices and increase in the wage bill consequent to escalation in cost of living index, unprecendented hitherto; one can look forward for a brighter year in 1984.

We have decided to increase the prices of our products by 10% with effect from 1st February, 1984 to compensate the increase in cost of production and to enable the industry to restore normal margins. The demand for truck, passenger car and tractor tyres has remained static in the last two years on account of general recession in the automobile industry, but there has been a tremendous growth in the demand for two-wheeler and three-wheeler tyres—the growth being 15 to 20% per annum. Your Company is fortunate to have its products under this category.

In my last report, I mentioned to you that efforts are afoot to delink Karnataka Scooters Ltd from the Scheme of Amalgamation with Falcon Tyres Ltd. I am happy to report that the negotiation with Brooke Bond India Ltd—a company with over 75 years of standing in marketing of consumer goods with a field force of 1500 salesmen and annual sales of Rs. 250 - crores has been finalised. To assist smooth transition, the company has co-opted three professional Executives from Brooke Bond India Ltd. to their Board. In addition, Mr C S Samuel, President & Chief of Executive of Brooke Bond India Ltd—who has guided the destiny of that Company for the last 10 years to attain a measure of strength and profitability—has been elected as Vice-Chairman of Karnataka Scooters Ltd. The Board has conferred on him powers to guide the day-to-day affairs of the Company pending amalgamation. I am proud to have been able to complete this task with the blessings of all concerned, viz. the State Government, KSIIDC, Central Financial Institutions, Bankers and the Creditors involved.

I am also happy to say that Karnataka Scooters Ltd will, in the near future, be one of the most prosperous two-wheeler units in the country comparable to manufacturers like Bajaj Auto, Kinetic Engineering, Escorts, Enfield, etc. Though I am sad to part with this Company as an entrepreneur who had toiled for it for the last 8 years, I have the satisfaction in handing over this unit to a worthy Company which will do justice to the Shareholders, Institutions, Creditors and the General Public, who have reposed their trust in us.

Coming back to Falcon Tyres Ltd, in my last report I had mentioned that the interim judgement given by the Supreme Court on the Post Manufacturing Expenses has created ambiguity regarding the contingent liability the Company may have to provide against the claims made on the Department between 1975-80 amounting to Rs. 30 lakhs. I am now happy to inform you that the Court has considered the Company's claim of Rs. 30 lakhs for this period as correct and there is no necessity for any write back. In view of this uncertainty your Directors have decided to extend the accounting period to 30th June 1984.

We are concerned about the energy situation in the State since the power cut and the demand cut have been increased to 65% effective 1st January, 1984. To overcome this, we have taken adequate measures to instal one more generator within the next one month which will improve the captive power generating capacity to 65% from 1st January 1984.

Our expansion programme to enhance the capacity of the plant from 8 lakh tyres to 1.2 million tyres, which was also pending due to acute liquidity problems the Company was facing, will be taken up and completed before June 1984.

May I once again thank you for the cooperation and kindness shown to me in running your Company with several imponderable factors beyond ones control

Yours sincerely

H. D. Shetty

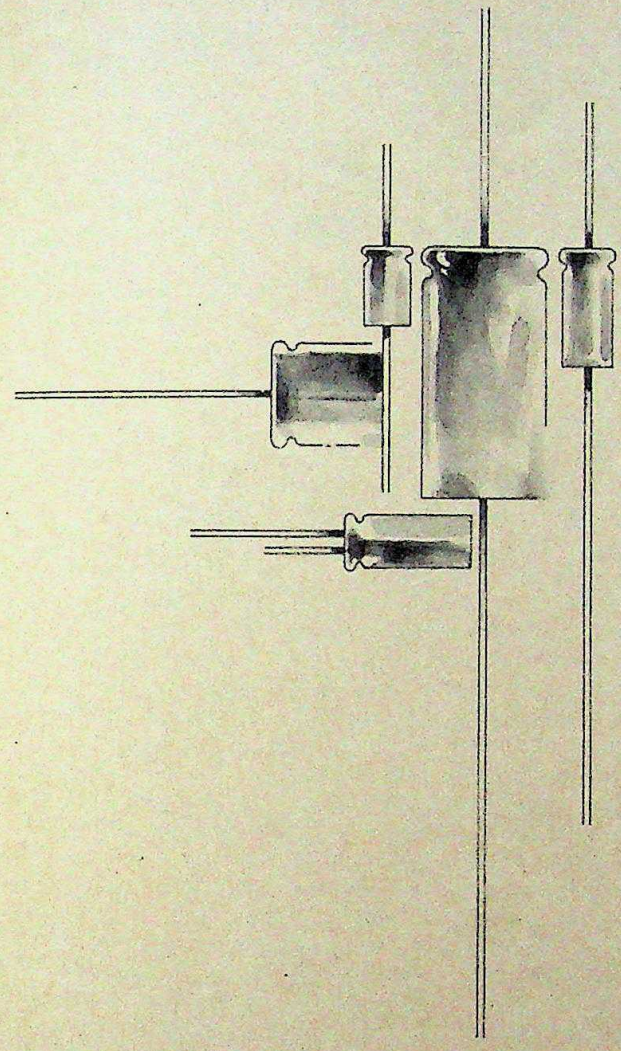


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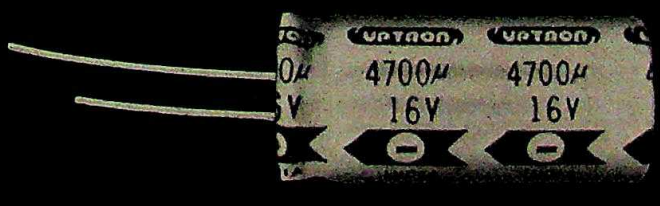
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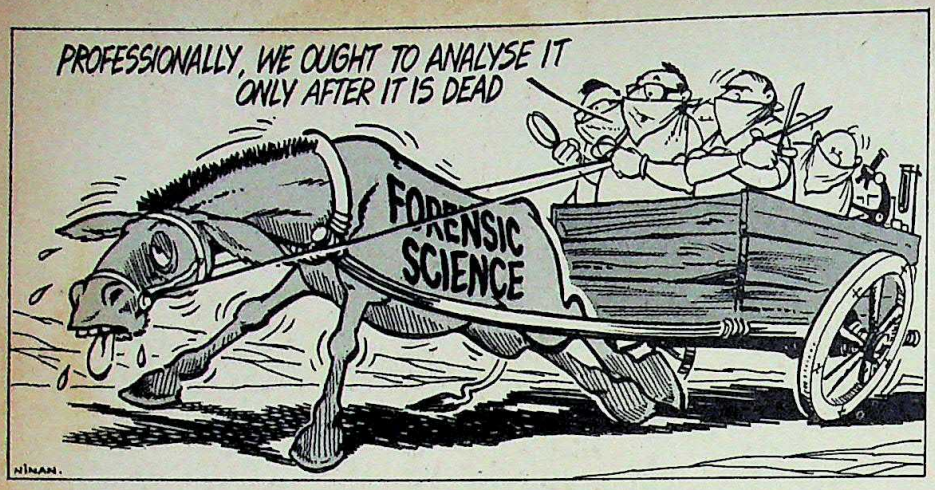
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FORENSIC SCIENCE

A Morbid Message

INDIA, as international statistics make clear, is not exactly the best place in the world to live. Neither, as the deliberations of a symposium in Bhopal so tellingly revealed last fortnight, is it a desirable place to die in. The participants of the symposium —the World Congress of Forensic Science and Toxicology—came to the unpleasant conclusion that forensic medicine, at least in India, is quite literally a dying profession. Which is grim news, considering that practitioners of the science are involved in analysing the cause and manner of death.

What clearly emerged from the congress was the growing concern at the public ignorance of their role and contribution to society as well as the steady deterioration in the type of facilities at their disposal. Even the chief guest, Vice-President M. Hidayatullah, was moved to candidly confess that forensic science had not received appropriate attention. But the problem is hardly restricted to public awareness alone. As one participant succinctly observed: "If it was only the public that was unaware of our role, that would be understandable. The real frustration is that even the government agencies close their eyes to our work."

Past Studies: That is only partly true. As far back as 1946, the Bhore Committee went into the question of just what was required to revitalise the profession. In 1962 came a report from the Mudaliar Committee and two years later, the Survey Committee report. The suggestions of these committees were numerous but, as is usual, very little has happened since.

To quote a part of the Bhore Committee report: "Every medical practitioner in charge of a remote dispensary, whatever his qualifications or experience, is asked to undertake medico-legal post-mortem in complicated cases of crime and he is liable to be held in question thereafter, the presumption being that every medical man is competent to undertake these responsibilities. But, unfortunately, neither the profession nor the judiciary nor the state has stopped to consider the absurdity of such presumption."

Thirty-eight years later, attitudes have changed only marginally; any medical officer is considered good enough to give an opinion on why and how a person died, a shocking state of affairs considering that forensic experts are usually called in only when the cause or circumstances of death are a mystery. That a forensic expert is part doctor, part investigator, is not generally recognised.

Investigative Role: The commonest complaint is that policemen do not consider it necessary to call experts to the scene of crime and invariably presume that an autopsy in a mortuary is quite adequate. Says Dr C.Ram Mohan, professor and head of the Department of Forensic Medicine at Hyderabad's Gandhi Medical College and honorary general secretary of the Indian Academy of Forensic Medicine: "Take a simple example: neighbours heard a couple quarrel, the husband was seen walking out, and later the wife was found hanging from the ceiling. The sequence suggested that the husband had killed her. But when we visited the scene we found her footprints on the sewing machine, indicating that she had climbed it to commit suicide. But if only her body had been brought to the mortuary, we would have been left guessing. We would have had to depend on other people's statements."

There are hundreds of such instances and yet it is only in the metropolitan cities that the police are aware of an expert's part. "In Bombay," says Dr C.A. Franklin, medico-legal adviser to the Maharashtra Government, "the police call us regularly to the scene. Moreover, there is an awakening among the people and if they are not satisfied with the police findings, they insist on a second opinion." But this is not true countrywide. Says Dr L. Fimate, 33, assistant professor and head of the department at the Regional Medical College, Imphal: "I am simply not given a chance to help the police in their investigations. I'm never called."

If cooperation is lacking, so are facilities. Says Dr B.N. Reddy, from Delhi: "The least you require is a table, a roof over your head and instruments. If a post-mortem has to be conducted in the districts, even this is sometimes not possible." One delegate says that at times even a saw, a basic instrument required to cut open the skull, is not at hand. "And so we are reduced to using a hammer and chisel to break the skull. That is no way to treat the dead, it is not respectful. But there is no other option. You may well have to conduct a post-mortem out in the open or under a tree. And there might not even be enough water to wash the body."

Poor Facilities: Morgues are rare and most states have just one, or at the very most two. People try to make do with ice slabs but the water makes matters worse. Decomposition sets in in about 18 hours and it is quite likely in the districts that by the time an expert gets down to work, the corpse is already rotting.

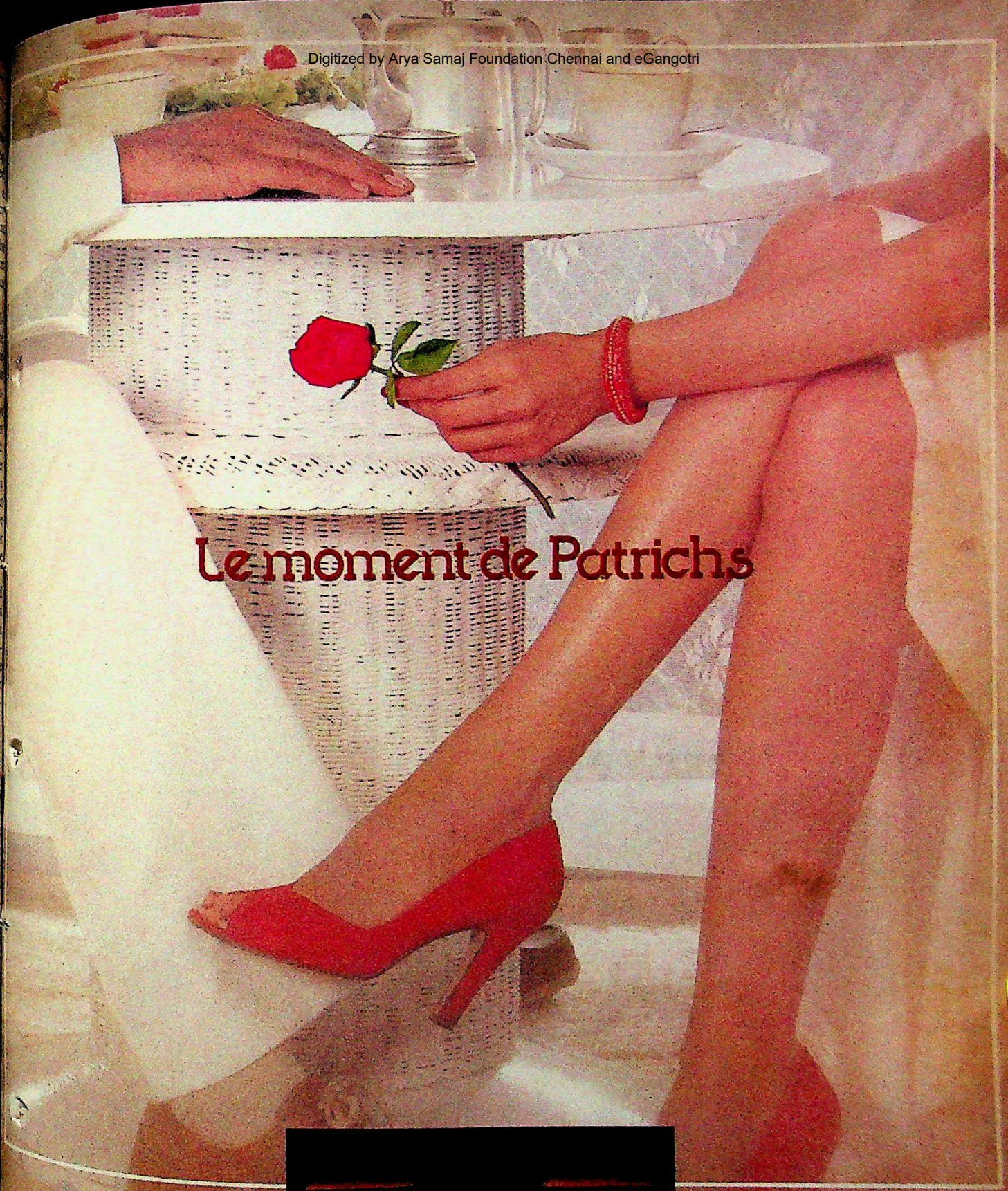
More worrying is the fact that there is an increasing shortage of forensic experts. India—countrywide, they number only about 200. What is even more alarming is that annually, only about an estimated two dozen join their ranks after post-graduating in forensic medicine. Although several medical colleges now offer this course, there are not many takers. As a result, many posts continue to remain vacant. In Andhra Pradesh, for example, there are currently eight posts of additional professors waiting to be filled. This is a far cry from a Central Government suggestion to all states to have a cadre of medical jurists which has gone unheeded for years.

Says Bhopal's Professor Heeresh Chandra, president of the academy, medico-legal adviser to the Government of Madhya Pradesh and one of the best known names in the field: "It is the dirtiest work available. It is very complicated, it earns you long hours but no goodwill. Moreover, there is no incentive. It is not surprising that new people are reluctant to join." Madhya Pradesh, the only state to have a medico-legal institute, is among the few states to offer an extra allowance for conducting post-mortems. Ironically, other more developed states have failed to do this, and indeed, most of them simply haven't given it much thought.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

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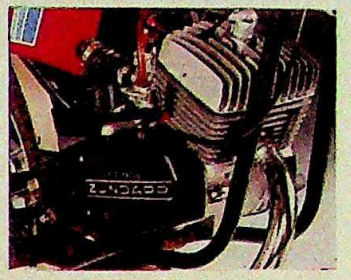


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Sleek instrumentation panel with panel indicators. Tachometer optional.

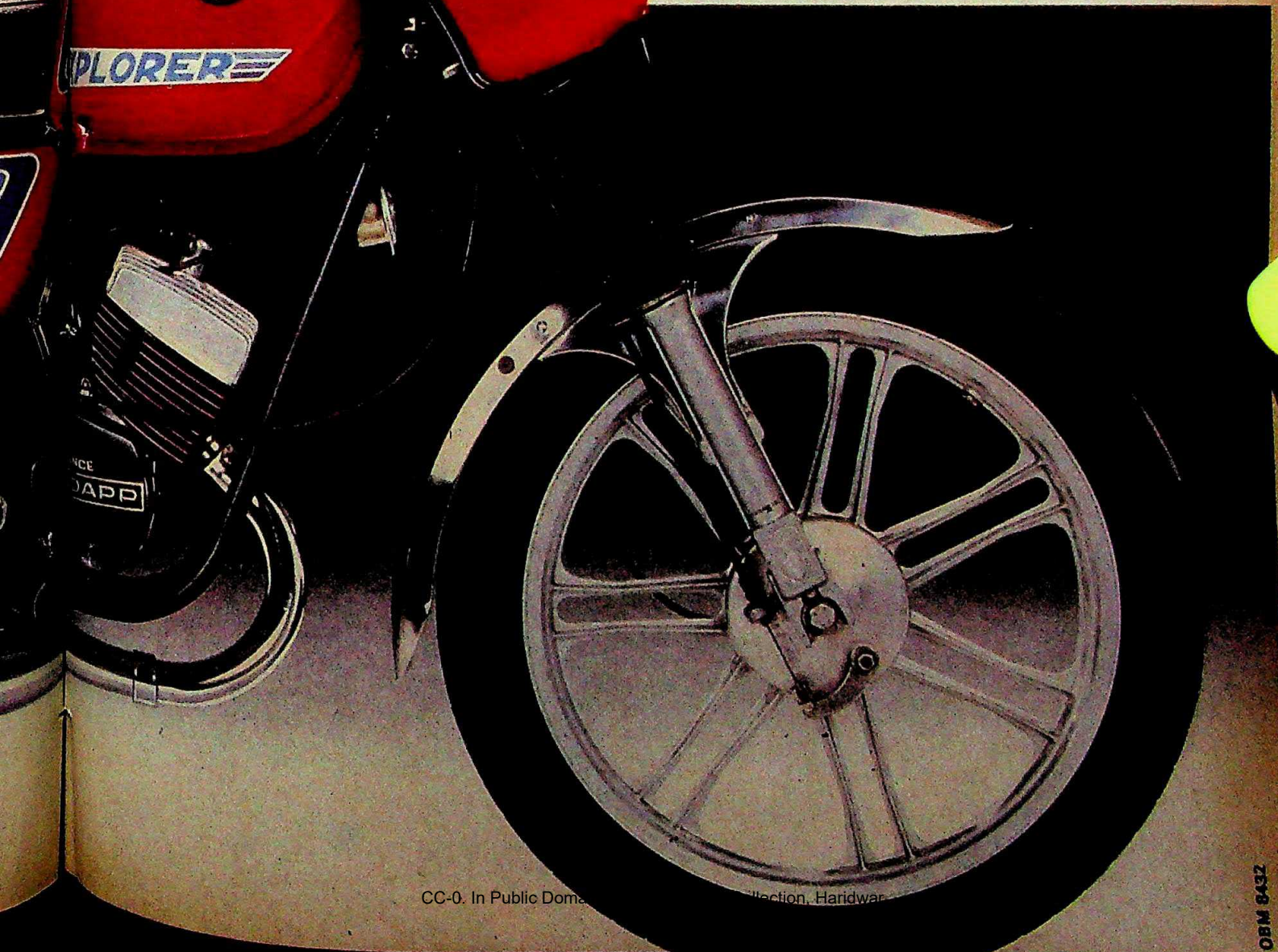


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A Silent Sonata

KHANDHAR
Directed by Mrinal Sen
Starring: Shabana Azmi, Naseeruddin Shah, Gita Sen, Pankaj Kapoor and Annu Kapur

"I AM LIKE a woman of 25 who remains 25 forever and cannot count her years. I simply don't count the number of films I have made." That was film maker Mrinal Sen last fortnight, speaking with his customary exuberance and a sharp eye for providing journalistic copy, about his latest offering *Khandhar*. His fourth feature in Hindi, it opened Bombay's Filmotsav to enthusiastic response and has drawn rave reviews in Calcutta where it is running in its third week.

It is a work so radically different from anything he has done before that, in Chowringhee's crumbling Metro cinema—itself a relic of 1930s art deco—there was barely an audience of a few dozen in the late night show but the film's atmosphere of melancholy and regret was amply reinforced. And the aura of unrequited emotion hauntingly conveyed at film's end was overshadowed by more basic questions, of shock and wonder, at Sen's sudden change of garb. How can a film maker, best known for his espousal of political politics and class struggle, switch his radical-gear to the musings of mundane romanticism? How can the hardened pulpit preacher become a convert so subtle that he tunes in to the individual's drum beats of an inner life?

Quietly Moving: For *Khandhar*'s extraordinary quality lies not only as a point of departure for its maker but its unqualified success in making us listen. It is a film of considerable visual beauty but its lingering images are of silences, of vanishing words, elliptical sentences and unspoken conversations. It is easily the best film seen this year, and whatever its predilections at the box-office, it is compulsory viewing for the film buff.

The story, as has been said before, is one of those quietly moving Chekovian subjects that belie what is happening on the surface. Subhash (Naseeruddin Shah), a city photographer, is roped in by friend Dipu (Pankaj Kapoor) for a week-end to his old abandoned family home in the country. Arriving by bus and bullock cart to the desolate and eerie ruins—which actually exist five miles outside Shantiniketan—the three fellows are set for a rambling, leisurely holiday. In a decaying part of the once-baronial mansion, now a maze of broken columns and caved-in ceilings, lives a blind and bedridden aunt of Dipu's tended by her unmarried daughter Jamini (Shabana Azmi). Years ago, the girl's marriage had been committed with a distant cousin called Niranjan. The boy had kept up his promise for a time but later quietly reversed his commitment by disappearing and marrying someone else. Now the ailing mother (played by Gita Sen, the director's wife), lying on an outsize fourposter assumes that Niranjan has returned with Dipu to keep his promise of marrying Jamini. In a chance encounter, she mistakes Subhash, Dipu's photographer friend for Niranjan, imploring him to take Jamini away in marriage.

SUBHASH NANDY



Sen: quality of perfection

Emotional Centre: The critical sequence of mistaken identity forms the climax of the film and is projected and played with a combination of silent, stupefying emotion. It is just as well that all the actors have some experience of working on stage, for as the two visiting boys and Jamini move around the central point of the mother crying for Niranjan to keep his promise, their physical movements convey the gamut of feelings as acutely as their stricken faces—feelings of desperate embarrassment followed by shock and finally pity for the old woman. It is a gesture of pity that prompts Subhash to reach out for her outstretched hand and admit he is Niranjan satisfying her impossible demand.

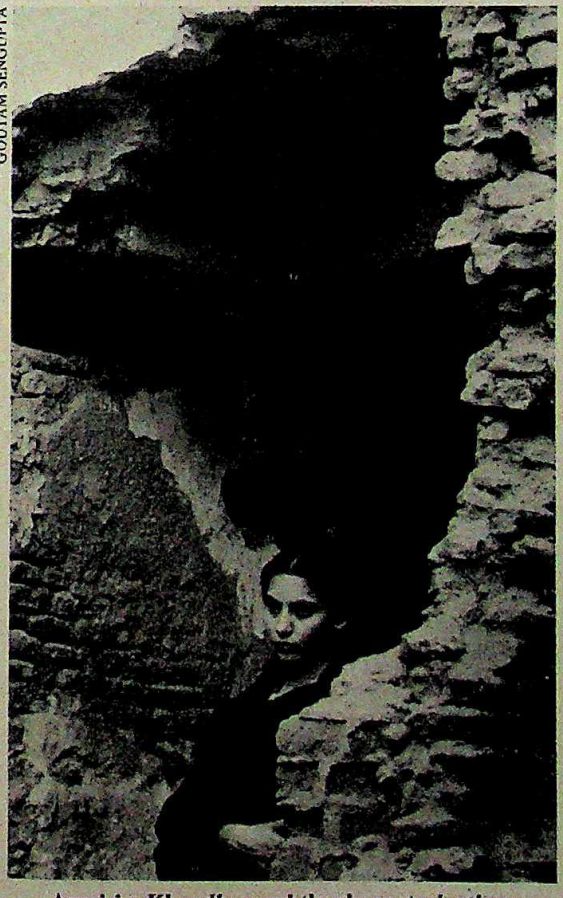
In handling the aftermath of this simple, utterly commonplace misunderstanding the director beautifully demonstrates his mastery of human frailty and his command of the medium's craft. Ostensibly, nothing happens: the boys' holiday has been rudely but only slightly interrupted. There is cursory talk of the incident, as a small piece of unpleasantness to be brushed off. Not much is said, and almost nothing by the girl whose mortification is the most.

Subtle Interplay: She attempts to see Subhash—half apologetic, half grateful for what happened—but cannot quite put it in words. She watches him, half-hidden by crumbling arches and shadowy corners. In her looks, her unspoken gestures, there is the faint hope that the charade enacted for her mother may somehow become reality. Subhash himself is not affected. He is touched by her silence and her resolve to spend her life looking after her invalid mother amidst the ruins. But his situation is as impossible as hers. He is, after all, no more than a chance visitor. And their odd, erratic encounters no more than those fleeting collisions that sometimes occur between humans before they are called back to the pressing realities of their separate lives.

In pulling off the subtle interplay of the characters, the shadings of inarticulated emotion and in never allowing the tension of events to flag, Sen has achieved a quality of perfection unseen in his movies before. *Khandhar* is probably his best film to date and will undoubtedly grow in stature to become one of his best-loved. And perhaps it is not such a surprise, after all, to see a fire-eating polemicist turn into a poet of understated delicacy. Both qualities epitomise the ultimate refinement of Bengali genius.

—SUNIL SETHI

GOUTAM SENGUPTA



Azmi in *Khandhar*: subtle characterisations

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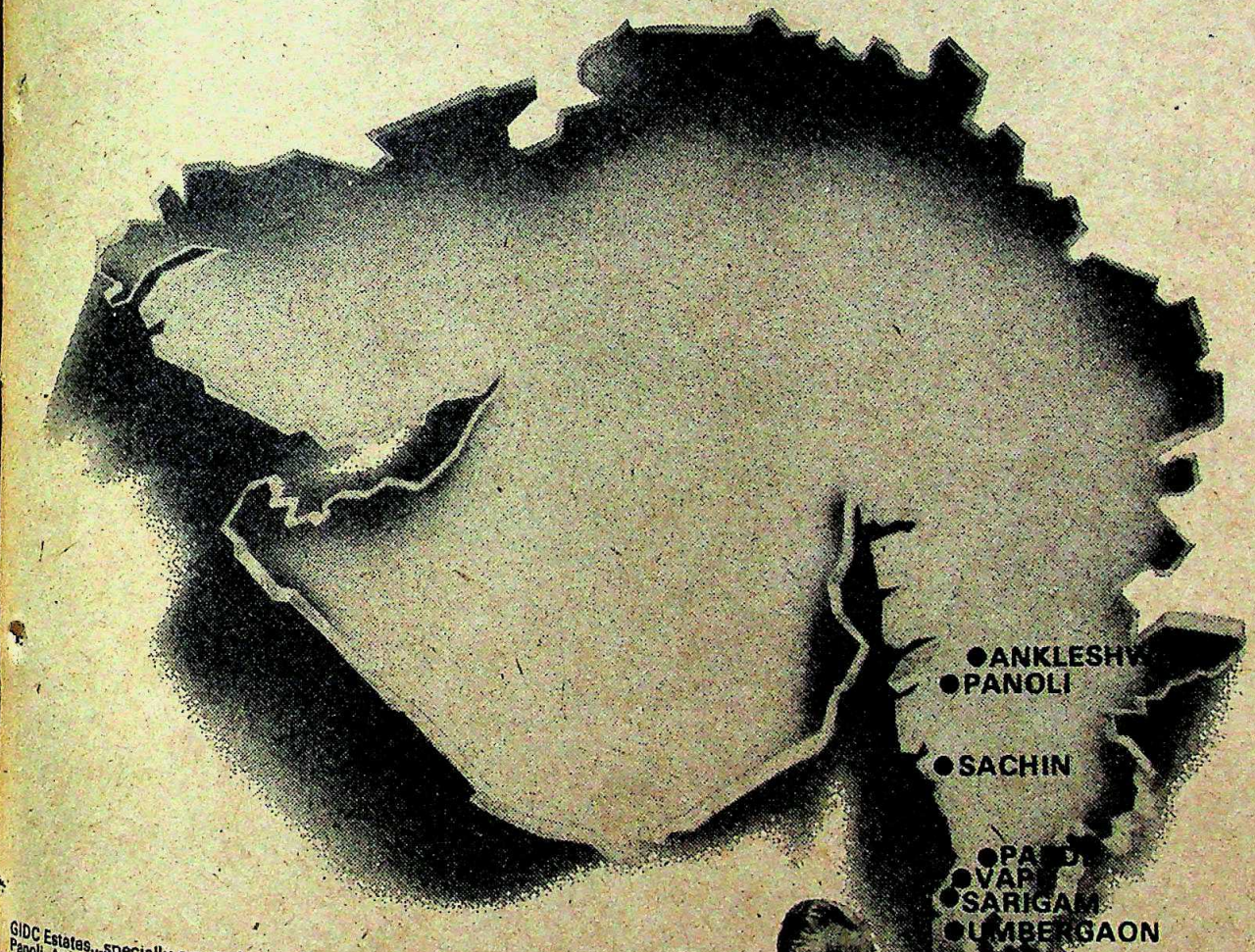
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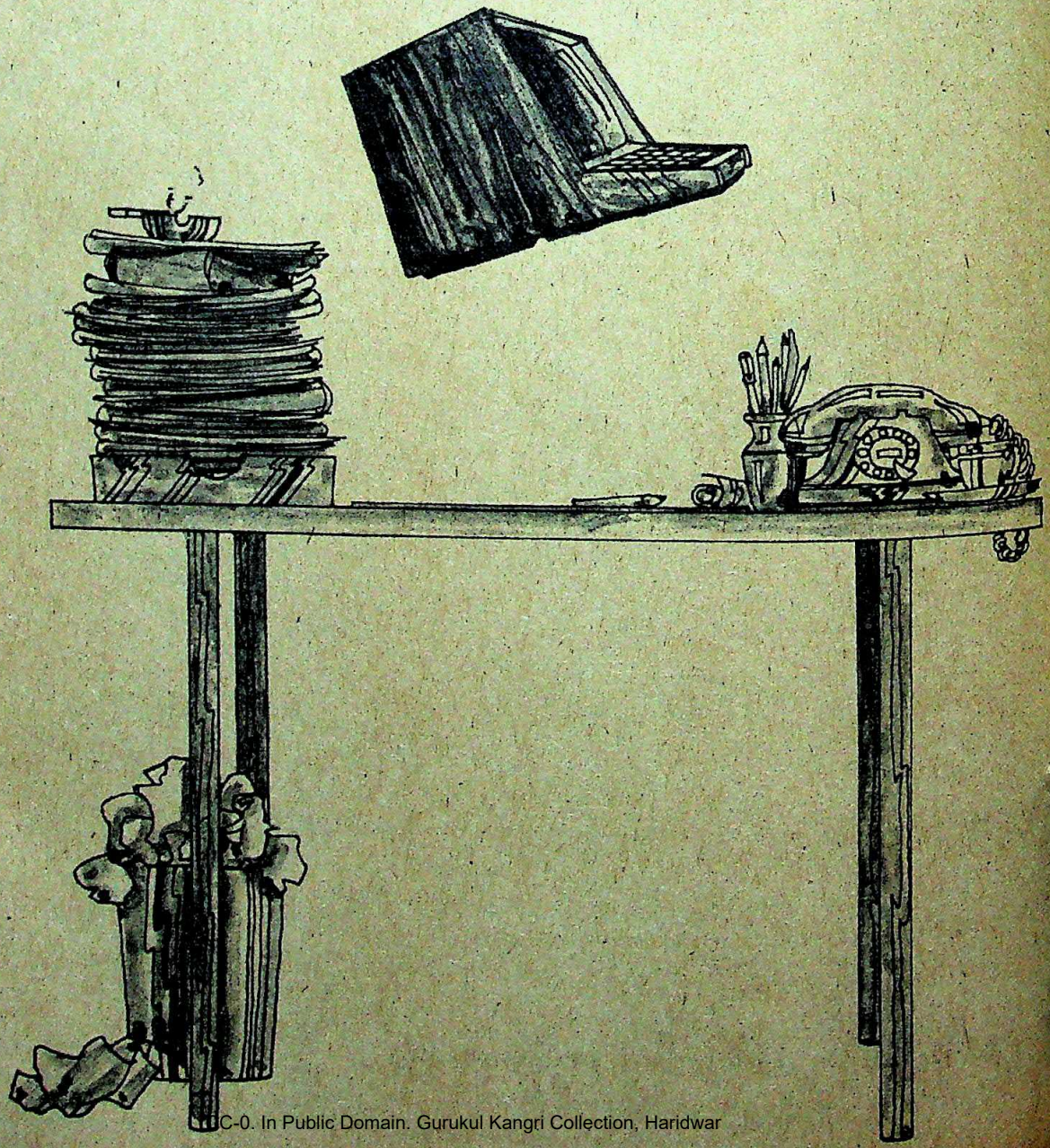
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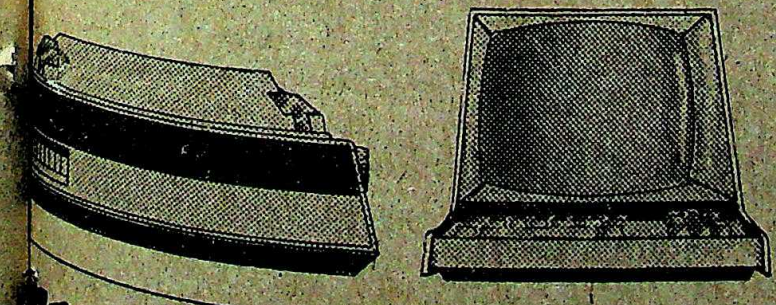
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The Workhorse HCL

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NATIONAL BOOK TRUST

Caught in a Bind

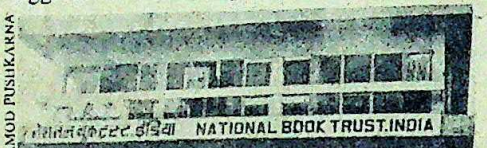
FOR A few senior officials of the National Book Trust (NBT), organiser of the Sixth World Book Fair which opened in Delhi early last fortnight, the biennial event held no joy this year. Even as the finishing touches were given to the fair, NBT came in for some heavy flak in a draft confidential audit report seen by few in the organisation. The report dismissed NBT's performance as "dismal", and outlined several instances of mismanagement which has resulted in a colossal loss of Rs 83 lakh between 1974-83.

NBT, which is heavily subsidised by the Central Government, was set up with the aim of making available literature at low prices and promoting the reading habit among the masses. Evidently its performance has fallen far short of the goals. Despite the generous distribution of complimentary copies, its shabby godowns are choked with unsold books worth approximately Rs 78 lakh and two lakh covers printed in advance for books that weren't printed. There is no specific policy about complimentaries, but by rule of thumb, about 10 per cent of the copies are given away. "I do admit we give away more sometimes when there are important visitors," says NBT Director L.N. Bhattacharya.

The organisation is very adequately funded: last year it received a grant-in-aid of Rs 1.09 crore, and published 164 titles at a cost of Rs 61 lakh. But books worth only Rs 25.88 lakh were sold. In an unprecedented bid to attract agents, NBT has agreed to accept all unsold books. Denying that poor sales is due to indiscriminate selection of books, Bhattacharya says an editorial committee "carefully" selects the titles to be printed every year.

Poor Record: This year's figures have been particularly depressing. With just six weeks left of this financial year, books worth a paltry Rs 10 lakh have been sold. State governments, the traditional buyers of its books, have not come forward with the hoped-for orders although NBT expects that when the major state grants are released at the end of the year, some orders will come in.

NBT's employees accuse it of "callousness". Sure enough, Bhattacharya admits that last year books worth Rs 15 lakh were damaged the very day after they came off the printing presses, when water seeped into the corner where they had been left. Another weak spot is its inability to react effectively to demand. Says an insider at UBS, a major book distributor: "Some of the titles that do very well, NBT has not bothered to reprint at all, while there are other slow-moving ones they keep churning out every year." Hindi fiction, he says, is a non-seller, with only an incredible 10 books having been sold the whole year, while books of general interest like *General Survey of India, Vegetables* and *Medicinal Plants* which have proved popular have not been reprinted at all. Publicity and aggressive marketing has been ignored—



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

The report dismissed NBT's performance as 'dismal', outlining instances of mismanagement resulting in a colossal loss of Rs 83 lakh between 1974 and 1983

and this, according to Bahree and Sons, prominent Delhi booksellers, is the reason for the low demand for NBT books.

NBT publishes books under three schemes: General; Nehru Pustakalaya, which caters to children, producing books at the subsidised price of Rs 2.50 a copy; and Aadan Pradan. Except for Nehru Pustakalaya, which is doing quite well, the other two schemes, supposed to be run on a no-profit-no-loss basis have bombed. Aadan Pradan is possibly the biggest failure. Under this scheme, the 10 best books in 12 regional languages are chosen and translated into the other 11 languages. Against the target of 1,320 titles by the Fourth Plan, only 160 titles were published, netting a mere 5 per cent of the total expenditure incurred. 10 years later, the total number of titles has crawled up to 491, despite reducing the print order to 1,000. In all, 7.43 lakh copies were pr... and the records say ambiguously that ... lakh copies have been "sold and distrib... free", without giving the breakup.

Criticism: The audit report has ac... expressed surprise that the Education M... stry has continued to give grant-in-aid ... Aadan Pradan scheme. "The cost of pr... tion has gone up to Rs 15 to Rs 26 pe... py—a price at which they may not ha... sale potential since they are beyond the ... of the common man," says the report. ... tacharya defends the scheme: "It is th... scheme of its kind in the country and ... have kept it."

A charge has been aired that NBT ... objective in its selection of titles: in the ... three years, three written by Krishna Ki... ni, chairman of NBT, were published. Bh... charya explains that one of these books ... been chosen even before the chairman ... med office. He adds that they were ... demand and had done well. Sales figures ... a different story—*Dwarakanath Ta...* print order 3,000; copies sold until M... 1983, 1,703; copies given away as co... plimentaries, 283. *Gandhi's Life*: print or... 4,982; sold, 1,144; copies given away... *Literature of Modern India*: print or... 3,000; sold, 662; given away, 204.

The organisation has been accused ... regularity in the manner of disposing ... ies. Bhattacharya denies the charge: "... sold books are being privately got rid ... authors deprived of their royalty. ... write to authors to inquire if they want ... books back, but most of them don't ... their unsold books returned," he claim...

Irregularities: The report alleges ... account of paper purchased and given ... rious presses is maintained, and it is ... ted that Rs 50 lakh is unaccounted for. ... director admits that no verification has ... made of the Rs 78 lakh worth unsold ... in stock, but pleads that no proper re... are available—although Bhattacharya ... been with the NBT for 12 years, he has ... director only for the past two years.

The report cites instances of ir... rities in the book exhibition organised ... during the Festival of India in Londo... spent 44 per cent more than sanctio... appointed an art consultant on the ... mendation of the information advisor ... prime minister, for which there had ... provision earlier. At the end of the ... bition, which cost Rs 6 lakh, it got ... worth just £200 (Rs 3,000). Bhatta... retorts: "We were not supposed ... books. It was just an exhibition."

Charges and explanations ... standing, one thing is clearly evident: ... not managed to make much difference ... reading habits of the common man.

—PRABHU

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PUBLISHING

Fair Deals

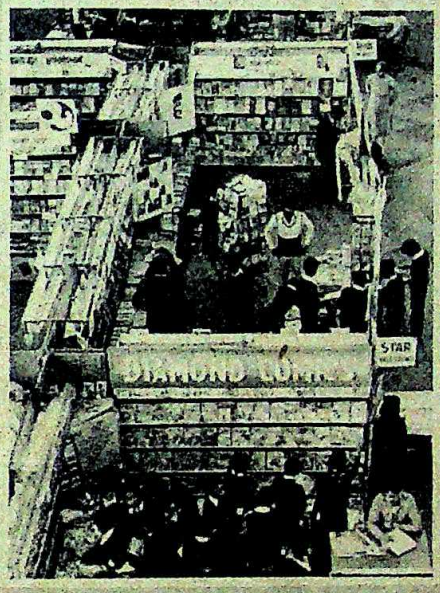
THE WORST thing about the Sixth World Book Fair in New Delhi last fortnight, according to a major Indian publisher, was that it wasn't really a bookish event. Sunil Sachdev, director of Allied Publishers and president of the Federation of Publishers and Booksellers Associations, was upset like many other participants at the poor organisation of the fair. "Look at this," he said referring to the loud film music blaring from the loudspeakers and people tripping on badly-laid jute carpeting, "is it possible to do any serious business here? It's like a bloody mela." Other publishers were carping about poor arrangements, lack of publicity, low attendance and inadequate sales. But if an overall view of the book publishing scene in India was to be fairly assessed, things seemed to be looking up.

After over four years of what one publisher described as an "institutional famine", the University Grants Commission (UGC) decided to sanction a mammoth Rs 12 crore grant for purchase of books by university libraries and institutions. Overnight, the fair was flooded with librarians armed with long shopping lists. And publishers of academic books looked jubilant. Said Tejeshwar Singh, managing director of Sage Publishing (India) Ltd, a firm specialising in research books on social sciences: "The grant is the best thing that's happened to people like us. It will hopefully help pull us out of the terrible recession of three years ago."

His sentiment was echoed by several of the 100-odd foreign publishers participating in the fair. Said Nak Young Choung, vice-president of the New York-based publishing house Harper & Row which sell mostly academic, medical and reference books: "India is potentially a major growth area for foreign publishers, though some of the laws restricting our expansion make life difficult."

Wide Variety: Indicative of the growth was the staggering variety of books on display: some 1,000 publishers were in all participating, showing wares of every conceivable kind. A whole section of the fair was devoted, for instance, to religious foundations; cheap editions from communist countries such as China and the Soviet Union were doing brisk business. "We hardly have enough books to meet the demand," said Li Shuwen of the China International Book Trading Corporation, admitting that the biggest sales daily at the Chinese stall were of children's fiction and the ever more popular kung fu books.

Established British publishing houses like Macmillan's and Oxford University Press (OUP), who have a long association with India and burgeoning indigenous operations, were equally optimistic about the publishing future. Sales at the book fair were no indication, they claimed. "The fact that many former book distributors are also turning into publishers shows the growing market," said Sridhar Balan of Macmillan's, whose



The book fair failed to set the city on fire...unlike the book trade which is humming with renewed activity and optimism.

school textbook programme has been steadily expanding with print runs of over 20,000 copies. "Academic publishing has grown by leaps and bounds," said Manzar Khan of OUP. Quoting his company's example, he claimed that OUP's range of Indian titles had jumped from about 10 annually five years ago to roughly 50 this year. "Obviously, sales are good enough for us to give a lead to our authors here," he concluded.

Other publishers with a long-standing association with India were even more optimistic. Kenneth Thurston Hurst, formerly president of Prentice Hall of New York, who was helping the US government-funded Indian-American Textbook Programme, claimed that the future for Indian publishing looks bright. He said: "Indian publishing has at last come of age. Some first class books are published here and could become a major export. Instead of indulging in breast-beating, Indian publishers should be proud of their achievements and concentrate their energies on exporting. Low production costs make India a haven for publishing."

General titles, such as the flood of kiss-and-tell biographies and salacious exposures that were the rage a few years ago have vanished without a trace. One publisher puts the cause for their demise bluntly: "Indian readers are much more discerning. They simply won't pick up anything that's shoddy. They're interested in better quality books, books that are better designed, better proof-read and, of course, better written."

Spreading Wings: One visible sign demonstrating this is the rise of smaller publishing houses covering writing in regional languages or speciality publishing. H.S. Bhatia, a retired army officer who started a company called Deep & Deep Publications specialises mainly in books on military history and legal systems. He has recently published three books by Justice Krishna Iyer. "If a publisher is willing to keep up standards, the market is there," says Bhatia. Sunil Rajesh of Disha Prakashan, a small Hindi publishing house that promotes younger novelists, says: "I started with four titles in 1981. Now I have 22, mostly novels and short stories."

Although the book fair's organisers agreed that the number of publishers participating hadn't registered a growth since the previous year, they claimed that the demand on space indicated the degree of interest. Further interest was supplied by a growing number of antiquarian book sellers with stocks of old maps and engravings. One of these produced the most expensive book of the fair, a work known as the *Report on the Ganga Canal Works* (published in 1854) by Colonel Cautlay, which was priced at Rs 1 lakh. The attention for the fair's longest book was grabbed by a 15-volume tome entitled *International Electoral Politics and Law* by a former journalist, Shiv Lal. Priced at Rs 13,000 and published by the Institute of Electoral Studies, its author was planning to update it.

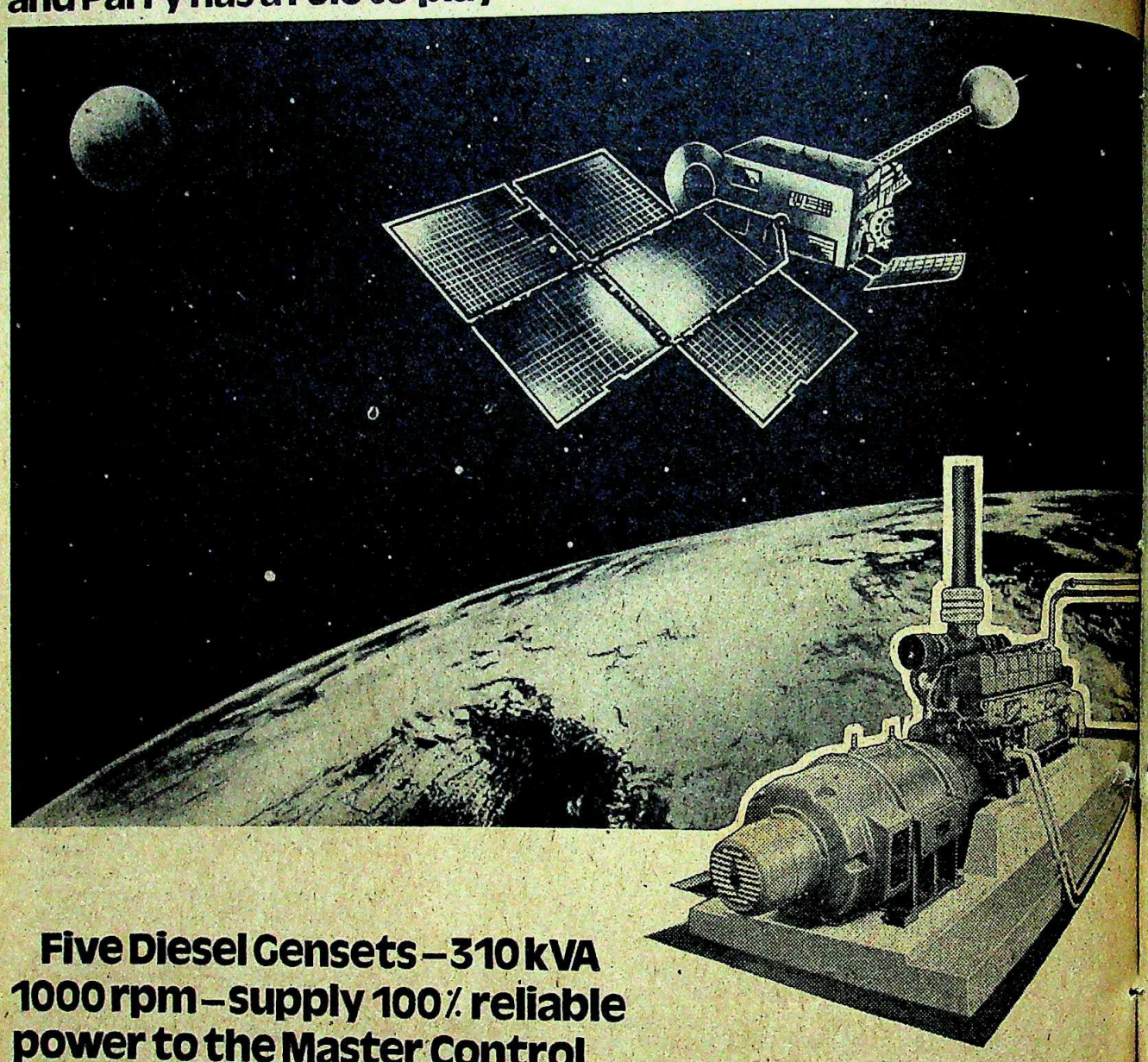
Such diversions aside, the Sixth World Book Fair failed to set the city on fire. Unlike, say, the Calcutta Book Fair which is jammed by huge crowds, the Delhi Book Fair over the years has acquired the reputation of a humdrum affair—unlike the book trade which is humming with renewed activity and optimism.

—SUNIL SETHI

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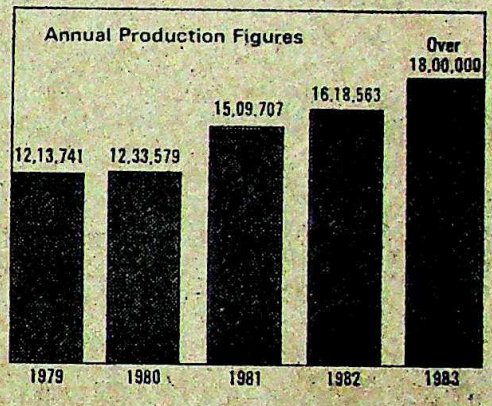
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Bedi (left) and Engineer: cricketing coup

■ The West Indians are coming, the Australians are coming, the Pakistanis are coming, and the English are coming. And greeting them on the playing fields of Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta will be two former cricketing kings **Farookh Engineer** and **Bishen Singh Bedi**. Farookh and Bishen have pulled off something of a coup. They have been jetting all over the world persuading cricket greats to come to India and grace a series of benefit matches. Among those on show will be **Sir Garfield Sobers, Imran Khan** and that fiery Aussie **Dennis Lillee** who has never played in India before. This is one series that should hopefully give spectators considerably more runs for their money.

■ What's in a name? Quite a lot, really, going by the way Silk Smitha oomphed her way to stardom in the south. Now other starlets hoping to tread the same path from screen vamp to leading lady are also into textiles: Nylex Nalini, Terylene Thangam, Georgette Ganga, Poplin Pushpa and even a Cotton Kanaka. But the girl who's far ahead of them in the celluloid contest spurns such clothing and calls herself simply **Anuradha**. She started as a child artiste and made it to character roles after matching Silk Smitha suggestive look for suggestive look as a vamp. Today she glitters in almost all south Indian block-busters such as *Tirupham, Priyamadan Prabhu* and *Manmatha Rajanakal*. Going by the whistles that greet Anuradha at the box-office, Smitha had better sharpen up her own silken touch.

■ Well it seems she's waltzed right into the heart of the high command. Last fortnight, the graceful, former actress and well-known Bharata Natyam dancer **Vyjayantimala Bali** and her husband **Dr Chaman Bali** announced their intention to join the Congress(I) ostensibly to help the high command to "fight divisive and oppressive" elements in the country. Lofty as the idea might seem, there is no doubt that Mrs Gandhi will need as much star material as possible before she faces the coming general elections.

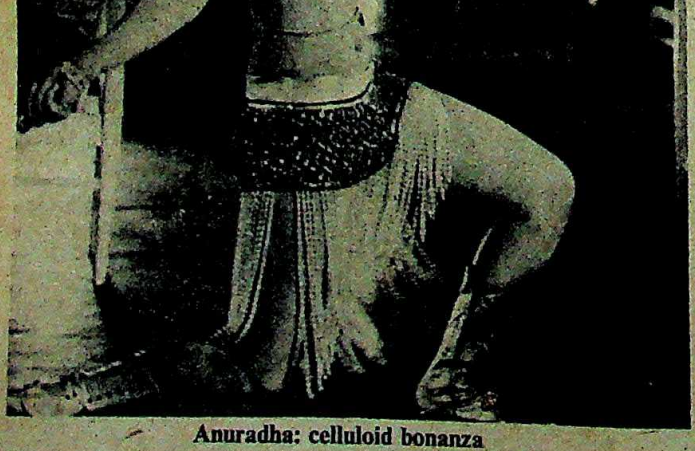
Although both Dr Bali and Vyjayantimala are professionally involved with their respective careers, as Dr Bali pro claimed: "One doesn't have give up a career to join a part We will be doing both things gether." The Bali couple ha been ardent admirers of M Gandhi and hope to be assign a role in the party soon. Said Bali modestly: "We have aptitude and whatever wor assigned to us, it will be a serv to the country."

SIGN POSTS

■ **Awarded:** Pritish Nan the editor of the *Illustrat Weekly of India*, the 1984 E Forster award, for his achi vement as a poet, translato critic and editor. The first re pient was Mulk Raj Anand.

■ **Awarded:** Well-known ar chitect Sharad Das the Asia Vishist Jyoti, by Giani Z Singh.

■ **Elected:** Biswanath B payee, senior advocate of Ca cutta, as the chairman of t Bar Council of India.



FILMNEWS ANANDAN

Anuradha: celluloid bonanza



Vyjayantimala: star support for the Congress(I)

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CONTENTS

Voices
Indianotes
Cover Story
Punjab: Anguish & Anger
Current Events
Tamil Nadu: Asking for More
Tamil Nadu: Enter the Hero
Tripura: A Border Breach
Maharashtra: Food for Thought
Karnataka: Bangalore Bust
Andhra Pradesh: Taking the Bait
Investigation
Banking: The Sethia Saga
Media
Maharashtra: Deadly Retaliation
Intelligence
Nair Committee: A Raw Repast
Law
Srinagar Jewels: The Court Case
Letter From Washington
Benazir Bhutto: The Washington Connection
Globe-trotting
Cuba: The Castro Charisma
Kashmiri Terrorists: Threatening Revenge
Neighbours
Diplomacy: Servants or Spies?
Pakistan: Breaking New Ground
Perspective
Soviet Union: Status Quo Ante
Trade Winds
The Economy
Industrial Climate: Subtle Shifts
Business
Escorts: Boarding Party
Markfed: Ailing Monolith
The Markets: Waiting Game
Special Report
Bihar: Private Armies
Crime
Madhya Pradesh: The Long Wait
Interview of the Fortnight
David Rockefeller: Banking on India
Health
Population: The Numbers Game
Environment
Mahabaleshwar: Threatened Resort
Sports
Chess: Stalemate
Tennis: French Finesse
Books
A Magical Reverie
The Arts
Dance: Kalakshetra's Queen
Poetry: A Rare Bard
Eye-catchers

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
AH SINGH AND PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Punjab & Haryana

The slow-burning fuse lit by extremists in Punjab sputtered alarmingly faster last fortnight when Hindus in neighbouring Haryana inflicted savage retribution for members of their community killed in Punjab since the trouble began.
The killing, looting and destruction of places of worship was matched by another spurt of extremist violence in Punjab, bringing into stark focus the human tragedy being played out in the two states.
Cover Story ● Page 18



Banking

The Reserve Bank of India and the Central Bank of India are caught in an embarrassing bind after the sudden collapse of the British-based Sethia family's industrial empire in Nigeria. The banks are left holding unpaid loans of over Rs 50 crore given to the Sethias over the last few years. More questionable is the manner in which the loans were made.
Investigation ● Page 52



Srinagar Jewels

The story of the huge cache of jewellery in Srinagar took a dramatic turn last fortnight. Dr Karan Singh, former cabinet minister and descendant of the Kashmir royal family staked a legal claim to the fortune in a court of law. The stakes involved are sky-high. An inventory of the legacy proves that the value of the jewellery is far higher than was originally believed.
Law ● Page 66



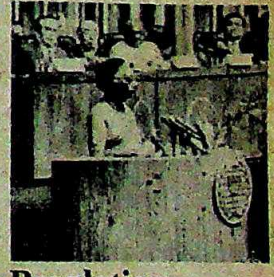
Pakistan

The execution of Maqbool Butt last month sparked off angry reactions in Pakistan and in the Kashmiri community in Birmingham. In Peshawar, where his widow and three children live, the reaction-level was considerably higher. In an exclusive conversation with INDIA TODAY, Butt's widow talks of her reaction to the hanging and future plans.
Globe-trotting ● Page 82



Escorts

The unprecedented move by the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) asking Escorts to replace nine of its 15 directors with nominees from the financial institutions has added an intriguing element to the Escorts drama. But the move also raises broader questions about the role of financial institutions in the private sector.
Business ● Page 98



Population

The recent international conference on population in New Delhi was an eye-opener in many ways. Apart from the revelations about family planning methods in other countries, it once again brought India's family planning programme into focus. A report and an interview with the union health minister.
Health ● Page 126

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NO SINGLE event has taxed journalistic abilities and perceptions as much as the bloody happenings in Punjab. Last week, as the Punjab problem assumed dramatic and dangerous communal overtones, the role of the press in reporting such events was brought into sharp focus. Newspapers in India have their own code of conduct which generally conceals more than it reveals. For a responsible magazine like INDIA TODAY, the task is a delicate one. Both communities involved, in the current state of tension and mistrust, are likely to react violently to the slightest hint of provocation in print. The responsibility, therefore, of reporting last fortnight's deplorable happenings in Punjab and Haryana has acquired awesome proportions.







INDIA TODAY *is no stranger to Punjab. The slow and agonising build-up of tension in Punjab has been tracked with care and caution. Last fortnight's events pushed Punjab onto the cover for the sixth time in almost as many years. The sequence of stories offers an agonising glimpse of the way events have gone out of control.*

In fact, the magazine's first cover in March, 1978 on Punjab was titled "Island of Prosperity", a title that was largely self-explanatory. Tragically, that distinction is now history. It was overshadowed in October 1982 by the looming menace of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and the parallel rise of Sikh extremism as reported in the cover story "State of Tension". In November 1982, the cover story "Battle Cry" took serious note of the sudden militant mood that the Akali morcha took and warned of the possibility of a Hindu backlash if the Centre continued its stalling tactics.

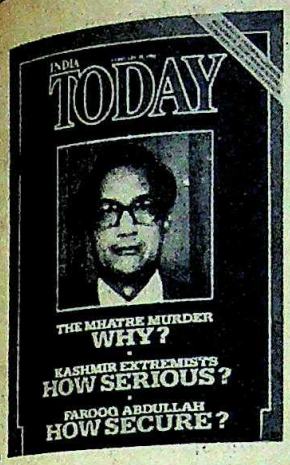
That warning was repeated again in the April 1 cover story when Bhindranwale's influence was spreading alarmingly and the Akali moderates were losing ground. It was repeated in more forceful terms in October of the same year when the Government finally sacked the inept Darbara Singh government and imposed President's rule. The cover headline, "Time to Settle" was a reminder to the confrontationists that the moment to douse the fires was at hand.

By last week, clearly the Punjab problem had spread its gospel of violence to neighbouring Haryana and its future is frightening to contemplate. It is a development that is as unique as it is ominous. To play down the current events in Punjab and what they portend would be a dereliction of journalistic duty. Yet, the possibility of inflaming passions and rekindling extremist fires must necessarily be a prime editorial consideration. INDIA TODAY's *reporters and photographers were on the spot when last fortnight's communal frenzy was finding unfortunate expression. Their photographers brought back pictures revealing in starkness the madness that left over 60 dead.*

In situations like this the only possible answer is for responsible publications to apply a kind of self-censorship. This is why the visual treatment in this issue is cautious. This is why the visual treatment in this issue is cautious, unlike its previous cover stories on Punjab this issue goes beyond the political implications and focusses on the situation as a poignant unwarranted human tragedy. Bhindranwale and others of his messianic bent may disagree, but we are Indians first and Hindus and Sikhs and Christians next. Fires first start with just one spark. The threat that hangs over Punjab also threatens the rest of the country, which is why the only hope is that the restraint exercised by the media will be matched by the antagonists.

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GUL MURDER

Your cover story on Mhatre murder (February 29) is good but it is difficult to agree with you that the Government responded alertly. For example, none bothered to contact the JKLF office at Birmingham where the kidnappers rang up several times.

Maqbool Butt could have been hanged in 1970 itself as an ordinary criminal charged with two murders. But he was held as political prisoner with death sentence hanging over his head. We see that Britain and Israel released many IRA and PLO terrorists respectively, although they were never executed as a retaliatory measure. Perhaps the most serious lapse is in making an issue with Farooq Abdullah on the Mhatre murder. Mrs Gandhi too can be charged with softness towards terrorists because she had rewarded two hijackers (Pande and Chhabers) with high positions under her.

24 Parganas *Abdul Rauf*

I strongly beg to differ with the comments expressed in the cover story. What is termed to be government action is nothing but an eyewash. It is ironic that the death warrant of Maqbool Butt could be signed only in response to the killing of Mhatre.

In our country the pundits, the imams and self-professed sants are allowed to rule the masses and die deaths of martyrs. The Mhatre murder does not mean the death of a human but that of a faith lost.

Rajiv Handa

What is gruesome and unpardonable is the failure of the Indian diplomatic mission to rise to the occasion. Had the personnel at the Indian High Commission been little more alert and not viewed the situation so callously, Mhatre's life would have been saved.

Bangalore *Ramanand Sharma*

The abrupt hanging of Maqbool Butt raises serious questions regarding the disposal of mercy petitions and thus, about the propriety of the death penalty. It may be understandable if not excusable that individuals bow to pressure. But nations favouring expediency to principle is unforgivable.

Bombay *Harsh A. Desai*

■ The senseless murder should serve as an eye-opener to the Government and it should demand the tightest security for our officials abroad, especially in playground cities of terrorist violence.

Bombay *Quaid Z. Najmi*

NEGLECTED DISEASE

Thank you for publicising a much neglected disease (February 29). Sikkim is goitre-endemic and the population of cretins (retarded offsprings of goitrous parents) is alarmingly high. A recent random goitre survey under the auspices of ICMR by Professor M.M. Kapur of AIIMS in Sikkim showed an incidence of over 56 per cent. If the Alma Ata Declaration of Health for all by 2000 AD is to have any significance in our region, the goitre and cretinism eradication programme has to be taken up in earnest. It is hoped as a short term measure, Injection Lipoidol (iodine oil injection) distribution will be available immediately especially to the vulnerable section of the society (mothers and children).

Gangtok *Dr T.R. Gyatso*

NBT DISAGREES

This is in reference to a write-up on National Book Trust entitled "Caught in a Bind". (February 29) The draft audit report contains none of the so called 'facts', reported by your correspondent and therefore the allegations levelled against the NBT are baseless. For instance, the audit report nowhere dismisses the NBT's performances as 'dismal' or outlines 'several instance of mismanagement'. Moreover, since the report pertains to the activities of the NBT during the financial year 1982-83 only, it could, under no circumstances, mention about the 'colossal loss of Rs 83 lakh between 1974-83', which itself is incorrect. Similarly, the report has not expressed surprise that the Education Ministry has continued to give grant-in-aid to the Aadan Pradan scheme.

New Delhi *D. Das Gupta*
Deputy Director (I&P)

COPYLIFTING

I was amused to read Ajit Haksar's accusation (February 15) that other groups of hotels have run out of ideas and imagination and that they have pinched Welcomgroup's ideas for advertisements. Would he admit that his own people have phrased their slogan "Nobody gives you India like we do" along the lines of Republic Airways slogan "Nobody serves our Republic like Republic. Nobody serves like we do".

Bombay *Shrikant H. Joshi*

HOLLOW BOOM

The commodities termed as "consumer products" (cover story, February 15) are just glamorised junk with outdated technology and absolutely overpriced. The manufacturer takes no responsibility once the product is sold to the consumer. There is no after-sales service and quality assurance is still a distant cry with the Indian manufacturer. As rightly pointed out by Haksar and Tandon, the "consumer boom" is meaningful only after the consumer gets his money's worth and he has a wide variety of choice.

Ahmedabad *J.V. Venkatesh Murthy*

■ While the article was thought-provoking and extremely well-written, it missed out the most important factor responsible for the boom—the hire-purchase system. The increase in the number of outlets offering such facilities are becoming increasingly attractive to the consumer.

Madras *R. Murari*

■ In your story you have mentioned the "rapid growth of market research agencies" and quote "Marketing and Advertising Research Group" as an example. May we take it that this complimentary and entirely appropriate reference is to our company, Marketing and Research Group Pvt Ltd (MARG), or should we be taking action against a hitherto unheard-of rival company operating under the name that is too close to ours for comfort.

Bombay *K.M.S. Ahluwalia*
Chairman, MARG

■ In an attempt to keep up with the Joneses, we are wasting money on non-essential items. The money could have otherwise been put into more purposeful use. And to make matters worse our planners have liberalised imports and given tax relief to such items.

Srinagar *Shaukat A. Malik*

■ An error seems to have crept into your otherwise superbly analytical story. You have mentioned that P.N. Rajamani, a supervisor in HAL in Bangalore, draws a salary of Rs 10,000 a month. It should actually be Rs 1,000 per month.

Ahmedabad *Narendra Patel*

The error is regretted —**Editor**

BHUTTO'S DAUGHTER

The interview of Benazir Bhutto (February 15) was very interesting. Her personality is revealed by her forthright denial of having written the book *Pakistan: The Gathering Storm*, which had obviously been faked. It is obvious that Benazir Bhutto is a democrat

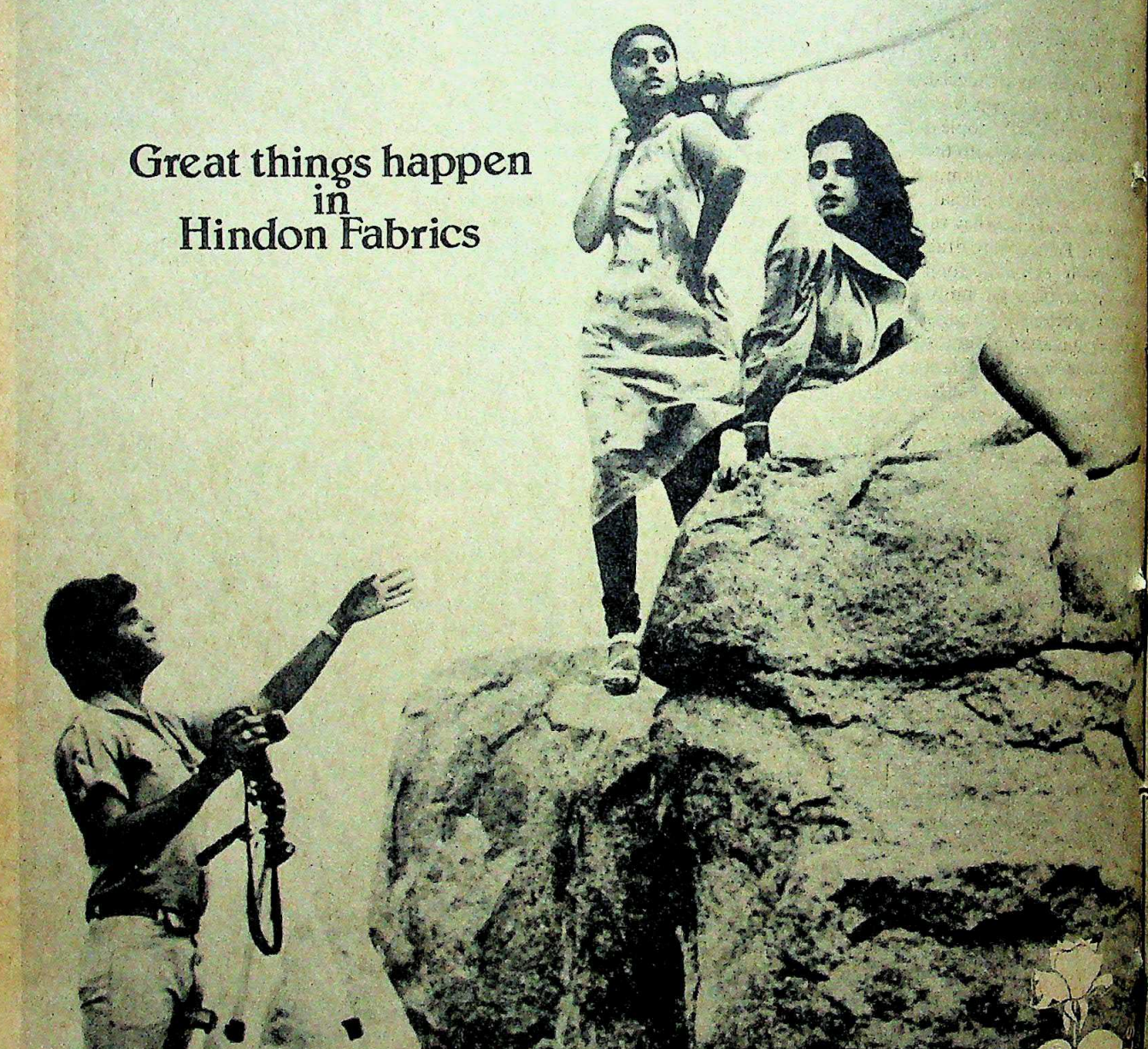
24 Parganas *Md. Salaudin*

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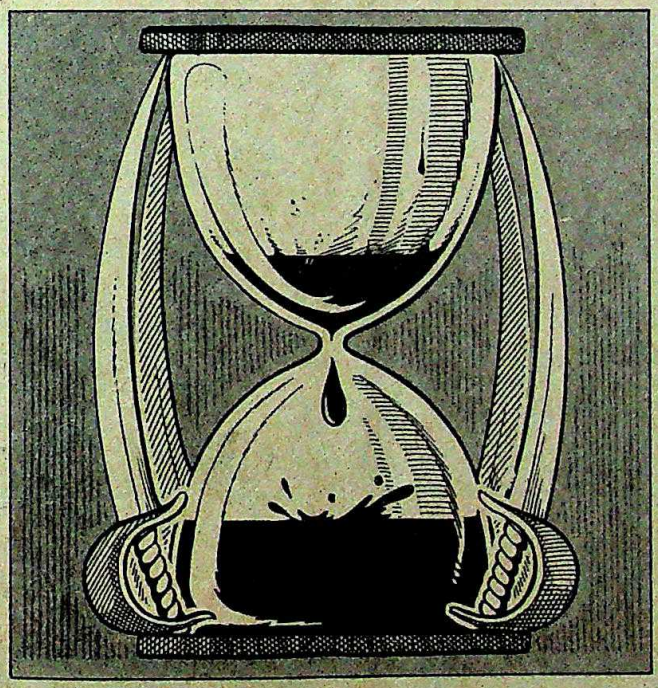
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INDIA TODAY
THE COMPLETE NEWSMAGAZINE

Time for Statesmanship

THE UGLY turn of events in Punjab and Haryana should surprise no one. It is a bloody harvest reaped from seeds of neglect and indecision sown wantonly these past three years. There have been warnings enough. When the agitation was in its early days, people died usually only as a result of mob frenzy or encounters with the police. Then, more and more, the deaths became killings, ominous acts of calculated vendetta, an editor here, a police official there, targets identified and done away with. And then they turned coldly calculated, to provoke retaliation. People were dragged off buses in the pitch of night and brutally executed for no reason other than the faith to which they belonged. Reprisals were only a matter of time and there is an even greater danger that the retaliation may still get out of hand as it did only a year ago in another part of the country, Assam.



There is little to be gained from recounting the saga of lost opportunities that makes the tragic tale of the Punjab agitation except to point to the one reason that cannot any longer be ignored: this is the time for action, not contemplation, not discussion, and not indecision. The gulf between Hindus and Sikhs, something that only a few years ago would have been unthinkable, is growing, filled by fear and mistrust, with the passing of each day. And it must be arrested before it becomes unbridgeable.

But decisive action is not the same as adventurism which is what storming places of religious worship would be. Undoubtedly some of them harbour criminal elements and there is enough evidence to show that some such places are used blatantly for arms training. This problem must be tackled, but there are other ways, and if it has not been expedient to send armed law-keepers into places of worship in the last three years, there is no more reason to do so now. Apart from loss of life, it would contribute to widening the gulf between the communities of northern India, not bridging it.

No, the action that is now called for is at two levels. The first is to seal the blood-letting before it becomes a torrent. Every killing today is an invitation for yet another, and there are enough people alive today who saw in the horrors of communal killing during partition what that meant for the very regions where blood is still being spilt today. Whether it takes the paramilitary forces or the army, the towns of Haryana and Punjab have to be cooled forcibly if necessary. There is no other way to bring even a small sense of security back to both communities in both states.

More important is the need for the Government to resolutely declare its hand. Long rounds of negotiation and discussion have narrowed to manageable proportions the essential differences between what the Government is prepared to yield and what the more moderate Akalis and, by implication, most Sikhs want. With the exception of constitutional changes on matters of religion, there is no great stumbling block to settlement, given a reasonable atmosphere. What is happening in Punjab and Haryana now is caused not by any impossible demands on the negotiating table but purely by a failure to act decisively on those demands and encourage passions to rise, first on one side then on the other. This is not the time to apportion blame; a point of no return has been reached. The Government must clearly, unambiguously and unilaterally state exactly how far it is prepared to go in accommodating the Akali demands. Having done so, it must immediately begin to give substance to its declaration.

Clearly, in deciding it will have to be aware of the need to carry the Akali moderates and the national opposition parties with it. If it does so, it will at least have the moral sanction to take whatever other action it must to bring normalcy back to Punjab and Haryana. Such follow-up cannot but include a clear understanding that there is no place in India for religious sanctuaries to be used by criminals as shelter, that private armies have to be disbanded and that the onus for this lies not with the Government but the communities concerned. The Sikh religion has a cognisable hierarchy and the Akal Takht has always had the responsibility of maintaining the purity, in all senses of the word, of its places of worship.

In the reality of today's politics, none of this is likely to come about unless the initiative comes from no less a person than Prime Minister Indira Gandhi herself. There's no guarantee that she will succeed, but nobody else carries the necessary conviction, and without her direct hand in it, a settlement may not be possible.

The stone in this pudding is the possibility that it may strengthen the Akalis in Punjab and weaken the Congress(I) in Haryana. This would be a short-sighted way of looking at things, for if the Congress(I) wants to rule Punjab with its two major communities living in sullen or bitter tolerance, it would be a hollow victory. It is worth remembering that times of crisis such as these are not moments for political calculation, they are invitations to statesmanship.

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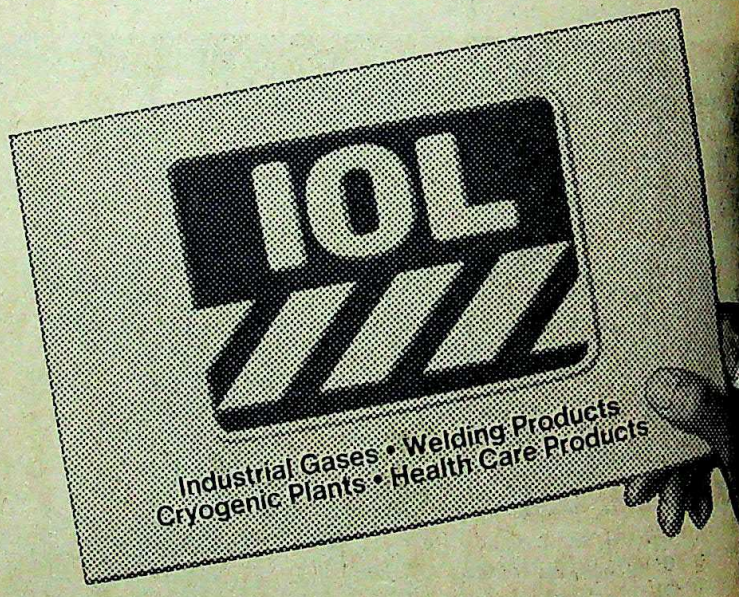
Indian Oxygen Limited (IOL) has acquired an enviable reputation for the quality of its products and services — in areas far beyond only oxygen.

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IOL's welding and cutting technology has added a new dimension to metal fabrication in industries ranging from automobile manufacture to shipbuilding.

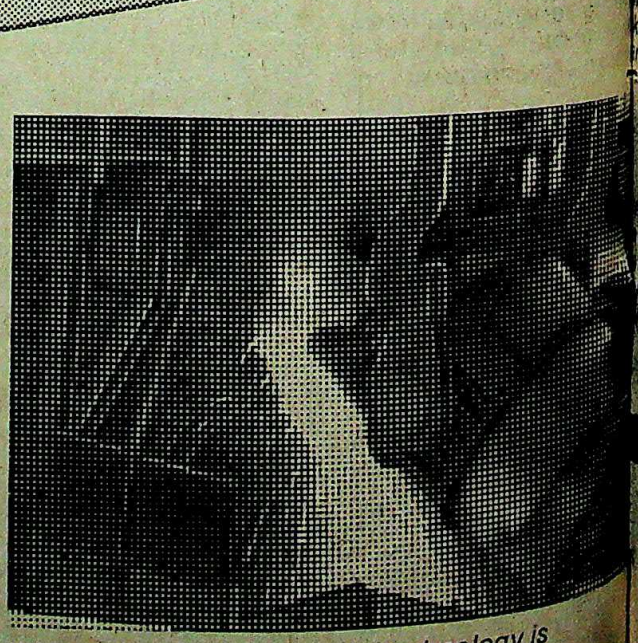
IOL's plant and associated equipment manufacturing activity has helped build and strengthen the industrial infrastructure. And advanced cryogenic technology is available to solve problems in critical areas such as food preservation and pollution control.

And in the field of health care, always a priority concern at IO the Company contin to contribute to the medical profession w wide range of essen products and service



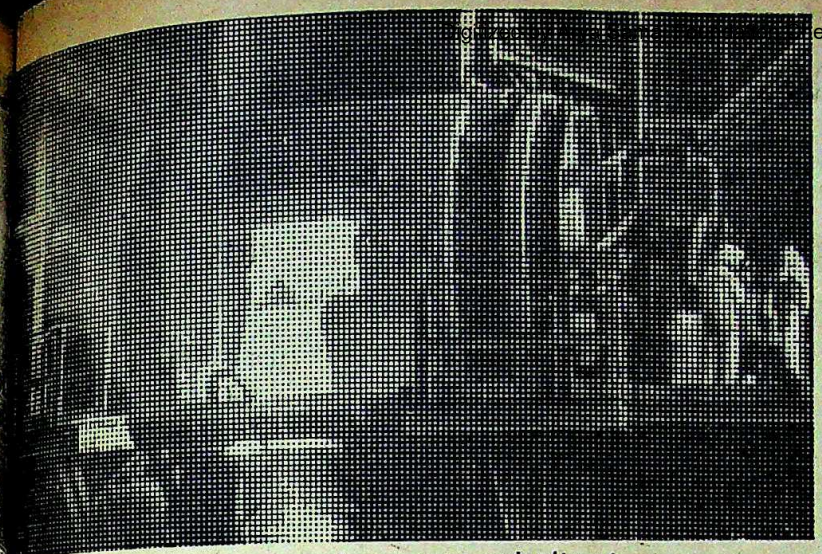


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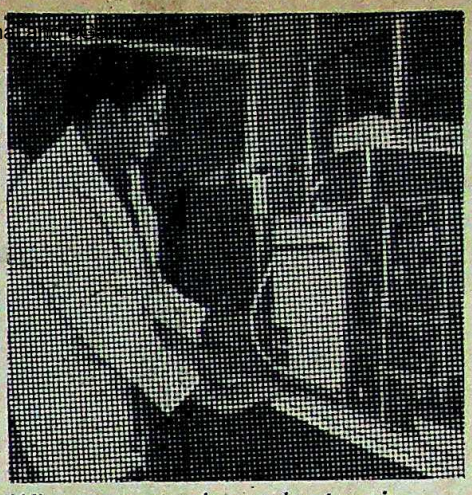


When advanced cryogenic technology is required for priority areas, IOL is ready to adapt it to Indian needs — to save energy, preserve food and control pollution.

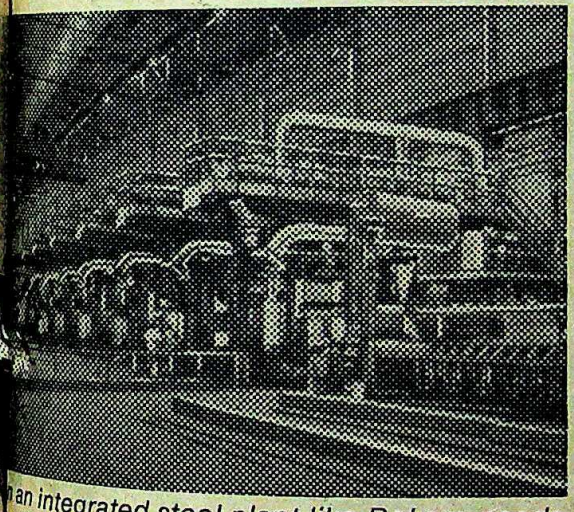
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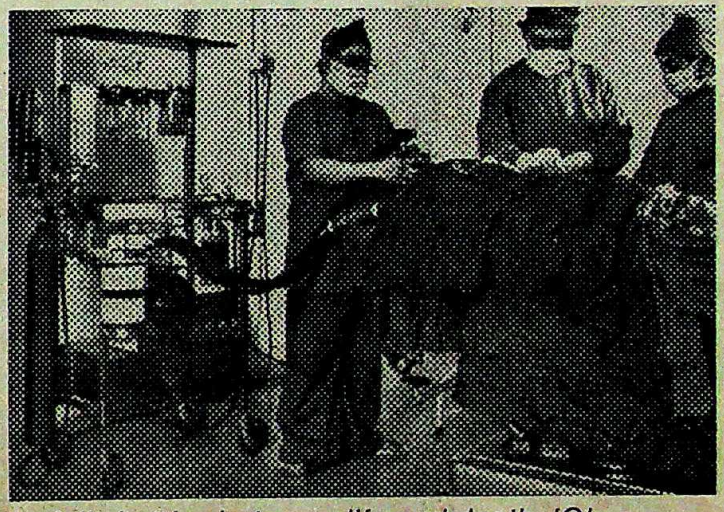
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Commissioned by Shri N K P Salve, Hon'ble Minister for Steel and Mines, the 3600 mm Plate Mill signifies yet another momentous milestone in the history of Bhilai Steel Plant—as Bhilai celebrates 25 years of production in service of the nation.



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With the successful trial run of its 3,600 mm Plate Mill, Bhilai's 4 million tonne expansion project is well under way. The initial capacity of this gigantic Rs. 558 crore Mill will be 950,000 tonnes of heavy plates, ultimately rising to 1.2 million tonnes annually. The size of the finished plates will range from 5 mm to 120 mm in thickness, 900 mm to 3,200 mm in width and 2 metres to 15 metres in length.

Spread over an area of 160,000 sq.metres, the 3,600 mm Plate Mill represents a major advance in Indian steel technology and incorporates a battery of sophisticated features :

- Computerised process controls — including those for regulation of temperature, width and flatness of the product
- Advanced power electronics for control of high capacity drives
- Close-circuit T.V. to aid furnace operations
- Evaporative cooling systems for energy conservation

A major step towards self-sufficiency

These heavy steel plates are essential to vital sectors of the nation's industrial infrastructure — ship and wagon building, bridge construction, the manufacture of defence equipment, large diameter pipes and tubulars, off-shore platforms and petrochemical and heavy machine building industries. To date, heavy plate requirements of these projects have had to be imported. Now, with the trial run of Bhilai's Plate Mill, India is well on the road to self-reliance.

Breaking new ground to meet the nation's needs

A project of this size and complexity has involved several unique problems and called for innovative solutions. Importing and transporting over-size equipment for the plant involved the design and construction of special wagons by the Indian Railways, and the chartering of a ship with sufficient derrick capacity to unload cargo weighing 250 – 270 tonnes a piece. Further innovations include excavations as deep as 24 metres to house a number of installations underground, in order to keep the mill floor reasonably clear.

Though the most advanced technology and skills in the world have combined to scale this new frontier of steel production in India, it is a matter of pride that the indigenous contribution is as high as 83%. MECON prepared the Detailed Project Report. HEC, BHEL and others provided a large part of the heavy equipment and HSCL was mainly responsible for civil engineering and structural work. And, of course, the entire project was supervised, controlled and monitored by Bhilai's in-house Project Division.

This massive expansion project is yet another example of Bhilai's commitment to the country's growing needs.



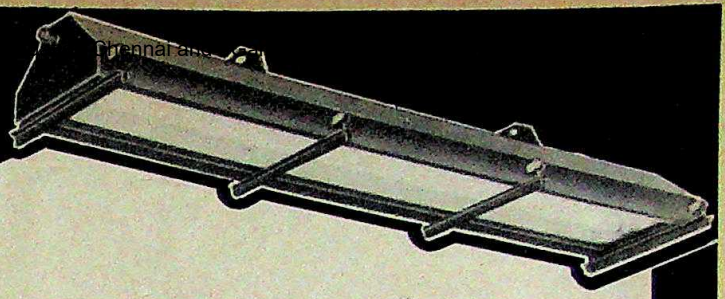
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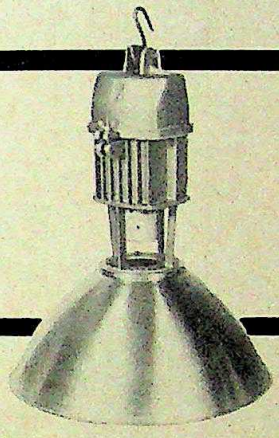
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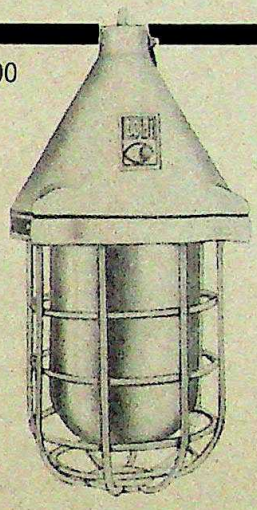


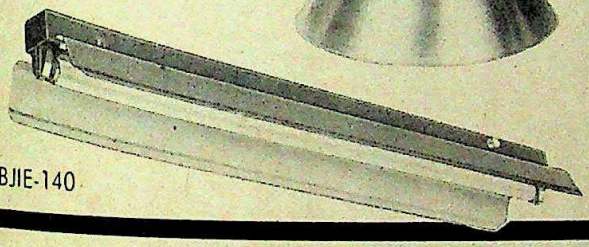
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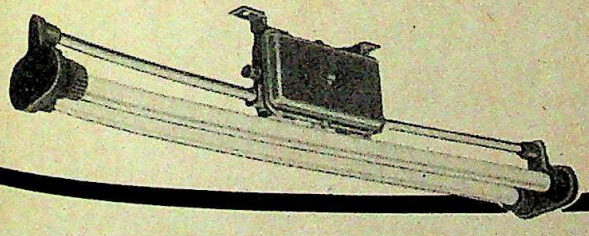
BJDW-200



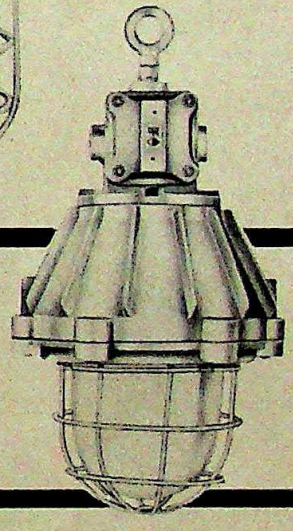


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» If Pakistan attacks, what makes anyone think that the Congress Party is our only salvation? Why should we vote for the Congress Party for fear that Pakistan will attack? We might as well vote for the army—they will protect us.

—Maneka Gandhi to Associated Press in Delhi

» There's such a thing as integrity in politics. What is obvious in the light of manipulations...is that the Congress(I) is a party with absolutely no sense of shame.

—Ramakrishna Hegde in The Illustrated Weekly of India

» Rajiv Gandhi may be soft-spoken or present an affable posture in public, but he is no better than Sanjay Gandhi when it comes to getting what he wants.

—Kuldip Nayar in Sunday

» India is now facing threats, both internal and external. Only Indira Gandhi can save us, for we have no other leader like her.

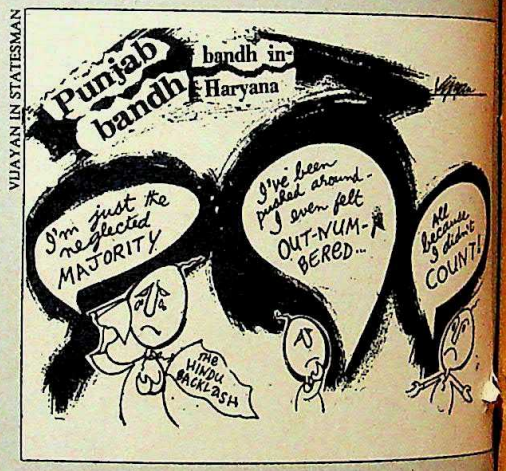
—Danseuse Vyjayantimala Bali in Current

» I regard myself more as a soldier for freedom than as a prime minister.

—Mrs Indira Gandhi to Polish newsmen in New Delhi

» More severe the test, better would be the prospects of a person so tested.

—A.R. Antulay's reaction to a Supreme Court verdict that he could be tried



VIJAYAN IN STATESMAN

» Somebody should tell Jarnail Singh (Bhindranwale)... that revolutions are not made by hit-and-run cowards like him.

—Editorial comment in The Telegraph

» Having made a living out of ridiculing his own people ...to the delectation of the Englishman, Nirad (C. Chaudhuri) would not miss the opportunity to have a swipe at...(Subhas Chandra Bose)...the man he once served as secretary.

—Ravindra Nath in The Weekend

» We have yet to feel the existence of this (Maharashtra) government. If Antulay was corrupt and Babasaheb Bhosal inefficient then Vasantdada Patil is a dismal failure.

—BJP MLA, *Ram Nayak in* Bombay

» I was terribly spoilt (as a child). But once I started going to secondary school a slap or two from my mom or dad was part of the menu for the day. Every day I used to get dal, rice, curry and thapad!

—Mithun Chakraborty in Star & Style

» A good actor should be able to make love to a chair and make it look like he is having an orgasm.

—Kamalahasan in Cine Blitz

» I am not a yogini. I cannot be wedded to my dance, I cannot go to bed with my dance!

—Swapnasundari in Society

» All of Naipaul's views on the Third World are biased, but with so much sophistication (and sometimes sophistry), that the bias is often concealed.

—Iqbal Masud on author V.S. Naipaul in Gentleman

» I saw an Ingmar Bergman film...I will never see any highbrow film hereafter ...Ingmar Bergman is a terrible bore...From now on I am only going to see masala films!

—R.K. Narayan in Imprint

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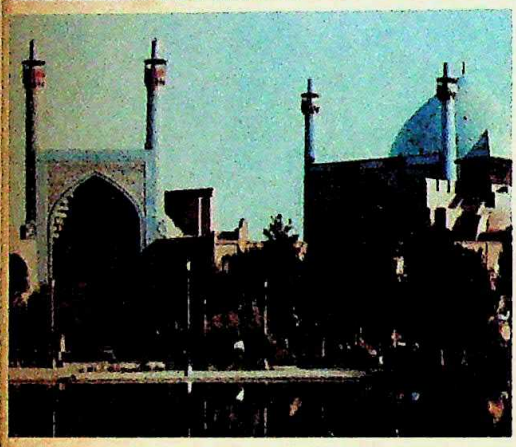
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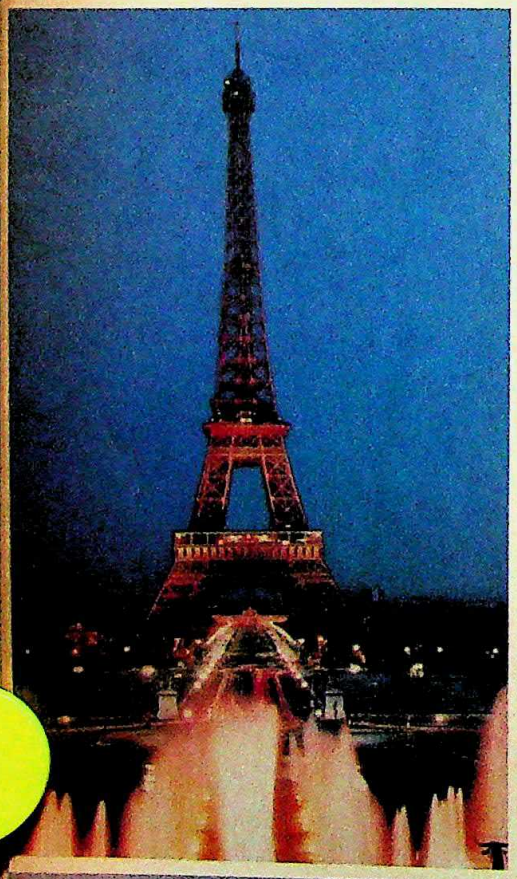
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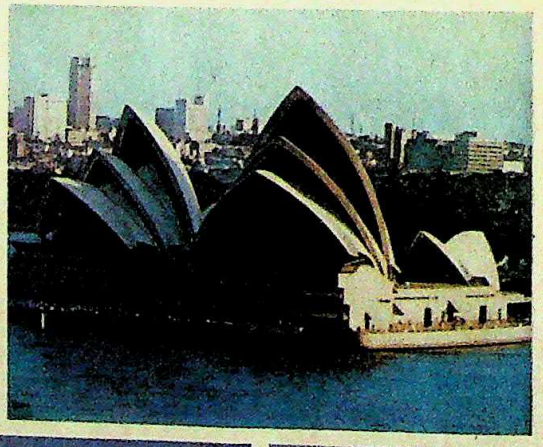
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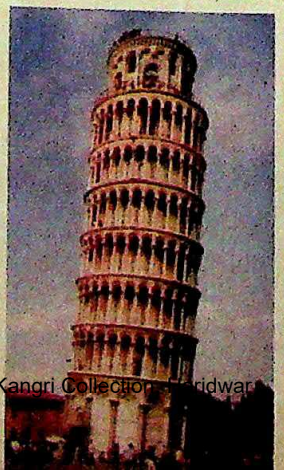








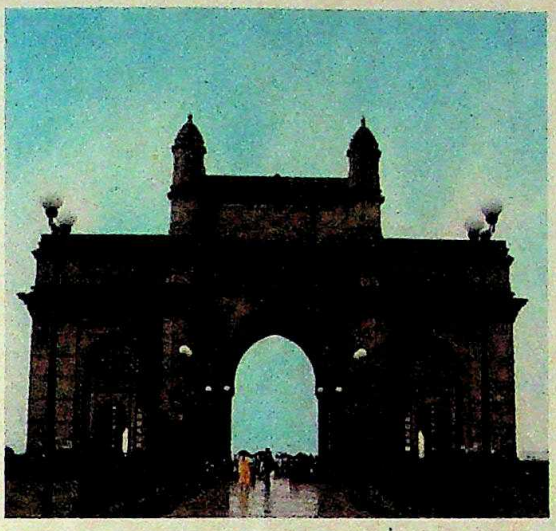




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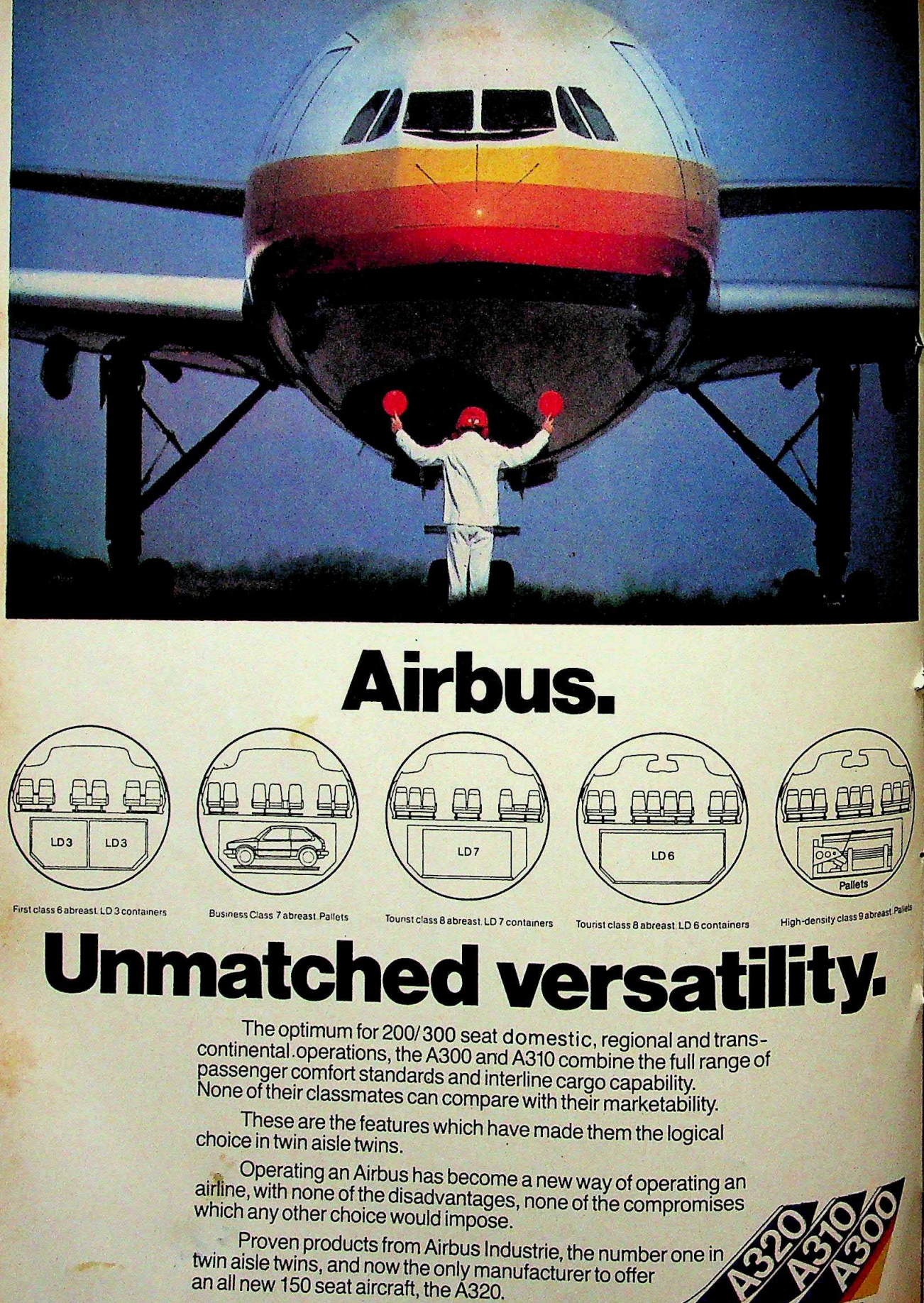
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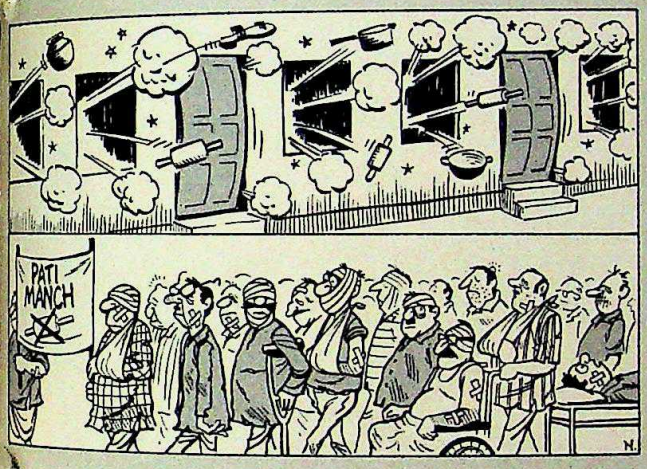
LEADING QUESTION

■ Students have steeled themselves to expect all kinds of questions in an examination but the one that was asked at the M.Phil examinations at the newly-formed Bharathidasan University at Trichy in Tamil Nadu took the cake. "Jayalalitha—a Margaret Thatcher in the making. Discuss" it commanded peremptorily.

Understandably, opposition members in the Assembly lost no time in asking what the education system was coming to. Education Minister Aranganayakam's defence was a gem: "It is a pity such questions were not asked when MGR was growing in popularity and was destined to become a great leader. His place in history should have been recorded. It is not wrong at all if a question on Jayalalitha appeared because she is becoming very popular and is a name to reckon with." Another ruling party member added that Jayalalitha should be included in the syllabus and not merely in a question paper as she attracted lakhs of people.

This torrent of praise was effectively countered by an opposition MLA who asked sarcastically: "In which case why not Silk Smitha in the syllabus or in a question paper since she also has very great crowd pulling magnetism?"





BATTERED HALVES

■ Workers do it, pilots do it, students do it, even policemen do it. Now the husbands of Kanpur have done it. One bright morning hundreds of aggressive wives woke up and reached for their rolling pins to find themselves stopped in their tracks by a poster which their husbands were holding up in the fashion of a shield. Pati Manch, it said simply—the words mean Husbands Forum. The henpecked husbands of Kanpur—henpecked is an understatement—had taken time off from dressing their wounds to gather into the Pati Manch, a kind of North Indian Treatment Organisation which protects husbands. The manch has appointed a retired judge to act in case couples go to court to settle their differences, and has even got a doctor to minister to the wounded. Rumours are that their better halves are coming up with a stinging riposte.

WRONG CUE

■ What a sight it is, a posse of policemen mounted dashingly in a jeep hurtling up to the door of a house to collar some goons. That is exactly what is endearingly described in press releases as what a police party did one night last month in Delhi. The Daryaganj Police Station received information that a group of gamblers was happily raking the stuff in in a building not very far away. Out came the jeep and a few seconds later the police roared up to the door of the building and rushed inside.

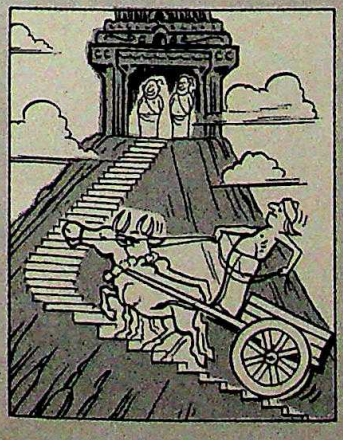
After that the script went haywire. As the policemen rushed inside, somebody found their jeep, got in, started the engine and was off before its rightful owners had got even one gambler by the scruff of the neck as intended.

There was no time then to think of odds and evens, of course, and when the police managed to alert their brethren elsewhere, it was a night to remember as police jeeps went rushing this way and that and finally found the stage prop abandoned near the Yamuna. Which only goes to show that policemen cannot be taken for a ride.



HOLY HIGH

■ The shrine of Lord Muruga sits atop the Chenimalai Hills in Periyar district of Tamil Nadu. It is reached by a staircase consisting of 1,320 steps which are guaranteed to take anyone's breath away. Last month, nevertheless, two bullocks hauled a bullock-cart all the way to the feet of the God, while more than 2 lakh people gathered at the bottom of the hill howled in fervent joy.



The scene must have been one of the strangest even in a country which takes the most bizarre forms of worship in its experienced stride. The bullocks were donated to Lord Muruga by a farmer, Duraisamy Gounder, and the cart was a gift from another farmer called Gopal.

The priest prudently had the cart overhauled so that there was no possibility of its falling to pieces on, say, step No. 878. The driver who inspired the bullock—they are said to have lumbered up the hill without turning a hair of their tails—was Sivanmlai Gounder.

It was no surprise that people came from miles around to watch the holy ascent. But after all this, nobody could discover the significance of the climb, and even the priest would not give any reason beyond saying that, well, it was there.

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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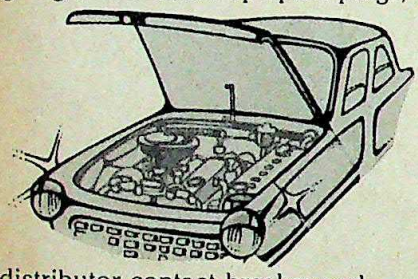
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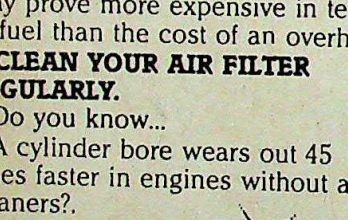


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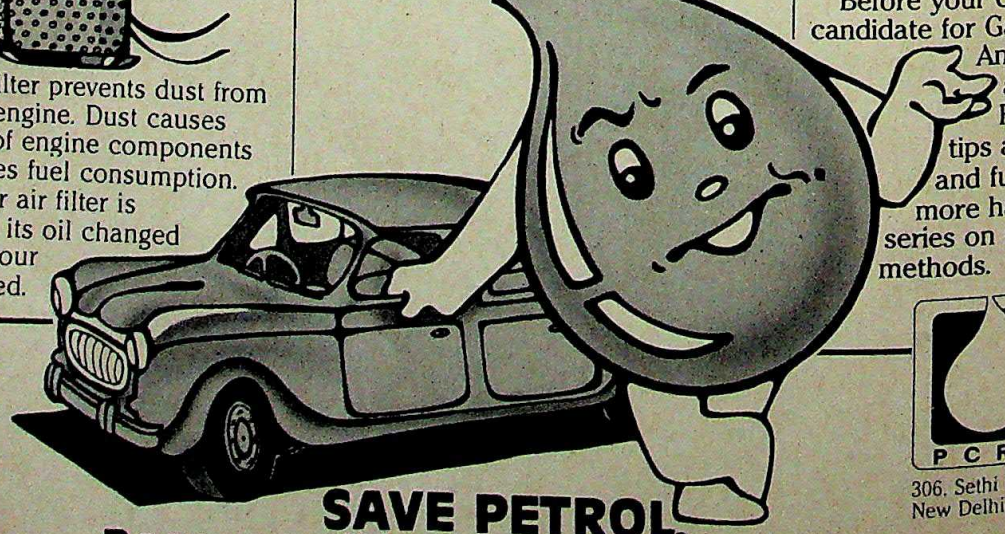
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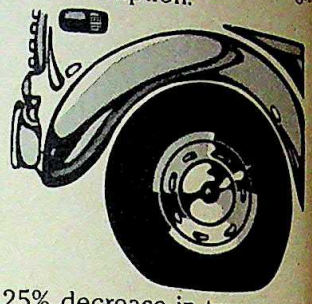


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PUNJAB

Anguish & Anger

THE LUSH green of the country's fertile north-west lies spattered with blood. In the space of one week of terrifying violence, over 60 people were gunned down brutally in Punjab and Haryana. By last week, the starkest and most familiar symbol of the great human tragedy being played out before a stunned country was the sight of wailing widows and fatherless children. In a region torn asunder once before during Partition 36 years ago, another agony was being re-kindled. And people watched helplessly and in growing terror as maverick communal politicians and frenzied fanatics held centre-stage and sought to divide the Hindus and Sikhs, living in close amity for five centuries, into opposing communal camps.

As the anger and anguish rippled through the fields and laid cold fingers of death on the vast sprawl of villages, it left behind a pall of gloom over the entire region. In Gurdaspur, Amritsar and Panipat, dazed widows sat amidst the debris of their lives, totally unable to comprehend the savage events of the last fortnight. As another round of tripartite talks between the Centre, the Akalis and the Opposition collapsed, the future was symbolised by the wisps of smoke that curled up from burnt gurudwaras and looted shops. The predominant question being asked now in Punjab and Haryana was: what had gone awry with such frightening suddenness and when would the madness end?

But none of these thoughts crossed the minds of the handful of extremists who have brought the region to this pass. The government machinery groped for ideas and desperately searched for miracle-men as motorcyclists, Sten guns slung round their waists and murder on the mind went about brutally shooting people in parts of Punjab and rampaging mobs in Haryana that held traffic on the Grand Trunk Road, the region's jugular, to ransom, pulling their quarries out of buses, cars and trains on the nearby rail-track to insult, injure and murder. Every incident in one state threatened to set off a chain reaction in the other. The vicious circle threatened to throttle the 3 crore people in the region, tear its social fabric apart and send its economy tumbling downhill.

There was no promise of succour for the sufferers. In Kahnuwan village in Gurdaspur district people still find it difficult to believe what they were witness to. As dusk fell and shopkeepers pulled shutters down a dozen masked men, riding motorcycles, roared into the market square. Asked one loudly: "*Kee, shuru kariye*?" (shall we begin?) and unsuspecting villagers wondered what it was all about. Recalls old, haggard Basant Kaur: "I was still wondering why so many guests had suddenly come to our village when firing began. It was total confusion and I ran for cover." Crouching beside their motorcycles and firing 10 Sten guns from the hip, the killers shot 16 of the non-Sikhs they could see in the market, killing six.

The first to fall was young Shiv Ram. He had just returned from Iraq with his pockets full of money saved after two years of hard work and hopes for Lal Singh, his poor father. Even as Shiv Ram fell another assassin spotted his brother Lekh Ram desperately trying to scale a wall. Wails Sheela Devi, the boys' mother: "They did not kill just my sons. They killed all four of us. Who will feed us now? Our helping hands are gone...why didn't they kill me instead? They could have just once asked me." Villagers, Hindu and Sikh, try and comfort her futilely and her cries only get more incoherent. The following day, as the bodies lay in single file at the hospital there was hardly a man in the village without a tear in his eye.

At just the same time, five past seven, another band of terrorists was hunting out targets at the nearby village of Bhaini Mian Khan and if it came back with a lower score of two it was not for want of trying. The smaller village had gone indoors earlier.

Unbelieving villagers are still unable to give a coherent account of the sequence of events. But they remember with horror the short encounter between the returning band of marauders and a few women returning



Grieving widows: dazed incomprehension

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from the temple. One of the terrorists wanted to kill them too arguing, "Let's not spare the root of the problem. They are the ones who give birth." But the one who looked like the leader prevailed, insisting that mothers and daughters were common to all faiths.

The trail of communal murder spread from Gurdaspur to villages along the Indo-Pak border in adjoining Amritsar district. In the bustling Putlighar locality of the historic town assailants knocked at the door of Congress(I) leader Krishan Lal Sharma's house and shot his son Ashok Kumar through the chest. They kept a kind of morbid balance by handing out the same treatment to Devinder Sehgal, son of a BJP leader. As panic engulfed the districts of Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Hoshiarpur the killing frenzy peaked with the murder of famous Punjabi author Sumit Singh, nicknamed Shammi, at Lopoke village smack on the Indo-Pak border. Shammi, ironically, was a clean-shaven Sikh (*see box*).

In complicated communal situations it is futile to try finding out what led to what but last fortnight the murderous spree in Punjab seemed to have followed the sudden mob outburst in Haryana, surprisingly in the predominantly Punjabi-speaking towns of Karnal, Panipat and Samlakha along the Grand Trunk Road. Portents were clear in the events of February 17 as marauding hordes blocked traffic near Panipat, burning buses and cars, stoning each vehicle that passed by including the car in which Brijinder Rai, a superintendent of police, was travelling. Shouting anti-Bhindranwale slogans the mobs went round searching for Sikhs in the buses, beating and humiliating them, as police stood by as if watching a kabaddi match.

Two days later violence broke out in Panipat—known for three famous wars that marked major watersheds in India's medieval history—and there was no doubt that this too was a well-planned operation and no sudden outburst. Hordes assembled at the call of Haryana Desam, a comically named and hitherto unknown organisation. They first burnt an effigy of Bhindranwale and then marched towards the one-kilometre stretch of the Grand Trunk Road which cuts across the heart of town and has two gurudwaras astride it. Recalls Bhai Hari Singh, the priest of Gurudwara Dhan Baba Jodh Sachiyar: "It was a big mob. They burnt a tyre shop and emerged with burning tyres in their hands. As the youngsters advanced towards the gurudwara I begged of them to relent, pleading that there was no point in harming a gurudwara patronised more by Hindus than Sikhs. I was rudely pushed aside. One after the other, they burnt all the 16 rooms inside."

As if out of nowhere mobs formed in various parts of the town and the orgy of violence accounted for eight Sikhs by the end of the day—innocent men trapped in the streets with nowhere to go. They were lynched. Towards the afternoon some of the mobs got together and attacked in strength the gurudwara in Model Town, following the by then familiar strategy of breaking in carrying lathis, knives, swords and burning tyres. Says Bhai Harbel Singh, the priest: "We had nowhere to go and just climbed on the roof-top. It was cloudy and suddenly a hailstorm began, sending the crowd scampering away. It was like God had himself come to our help."

But "help" had come a little too late for yet another gurudwara in the town and for two persons in the nearby town of Jind where crowds went berserk after the arrival of the body of a CRPF constable killed in an extremist ambush in Punjab three days earlier.

In the week-long violence the people's confidence in the Government's ability to protect them hit rock-bottom in both states. In Kahnuwan, as people ran to the police



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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station just a hundred metres away from the market square where terrorists crouched they were told by the officer in charge to wait for a while. Recalls Jaspal Singh: "They not only asked us to wait but also bolted the door from inside to save themselves first. In fact they did not come out till they were sure that the terrorists had crossed the village boundaries."

In Lopoke, Sumit Singh was gunned down barely a hundred metres away from a police picket and nearly 20 terrorists had reached the village driving past a battalion headquarters of the Border Security Force (BSF). Said Arjun Singh Mastana, CPI legislator from Lopoke: "The policemen shut themselves up in the thana out of fear. Here we live with the paradox of the Government having taken away even our licensed weapons, leaving us easy meat for terrorists who have all kinds of modern firearms."

Later, in a belated confession of its failure the state Government had issued orders authorising people to carry licensed weapons for self-defence. Not in one case had the police been able to give chase to the killers and Pritam Singh Bhindar, the flamboyant boss of the police force, fooled no one but himself as he explained his lack of success at Gurdaspur. He argued: "Our problem is there is a network of link roads in the Punjab countryside which makes it impossible to chase and trace the killers."

Meanwhile, the deputy commissioners in Punjab were besieged with applications for arms licences from non-Sikhs. Similarly in Haryana, the Sikhs were getting increasingly disillusioned with the state Government's ability to protect them. In Panipat the police keep quiet not just while the gurudwaras were burnt, but also when the mob cut the hose-pipes of the fire tenders.

Increasingly, Sikhs in Haryana were alleging that Bhajan Lal did not exactly help restore popular confidence in the impartiality of his administration by firmly stating that "the violence in Haryana was a natural consequence of what had been happening in Punjab for a year and a half". In a fit of new-found confidence he asked the Akalis "to give up the path of communal politics which had had its backlash in this state". The Hindus in Punjab loudly demanded more CRPF, BSF and the army. So did the Sikhs in Haryana. The Government faced a difficult situation with the respective state police forces coming under allegations of bias.

Even as the communal tension rose with each passing day and each violent incident right-thinking men among the two communities were trying to reverse the process by playing up the age-old amity between the communities. Said Kirpal Singh, a former MP and president of the Chief Khalsa Diwan: "Those who kill in the name of religion profanity their own faith. They are not God-men. The need of the hour is that we talk less about them and more about people who, in spite of the risk involved in it, saved the lives of the fellow Sikhs and Hindus. Give them honours and siropas. Write about them in the newspapers."

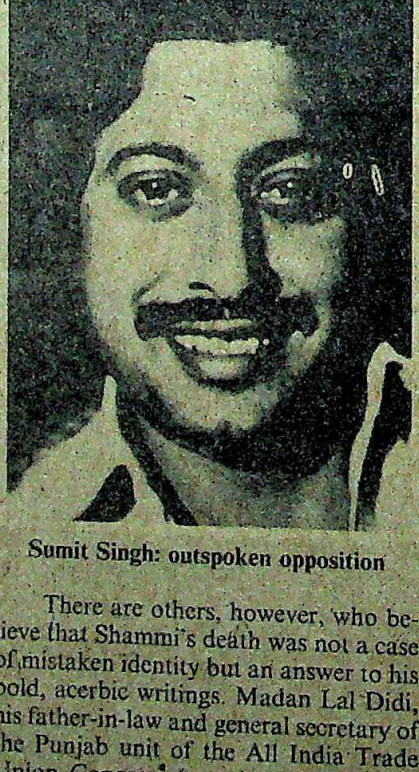
LOPOKE

A Voice Stilled

ON THE evening of February 22, shots rang out in the quiet border village of Lopoke, 25 km from Amritsar. They claimed the life of Sumit Singh—Shammi to his friends—the popular young editor of *Preet Lari*, a trend-setting, left-of-centre literary journal. But more than the personal tragedy that it was for his family, Shammi's death made frighteningly clear to the thousands of his readers, admirers and friends, the magnitude of the human tragedy that was shattering the heart of northern India.

At 30, Shammi was widely read and respected, and more of late for his bold stand against religious extremism of the kind perpetrated by Bhindranwale. He was not forgiven for that. On the fateful evening, Shammi, a clean-shaven Sikh, and his brother Rituraj Singh were going by motorcycle to a nearby village to collect a shirt from their tailor, when they were waylaid by extremists. "Where are you taking this traitor to the faith?" shouted one to Shammi's brother. Before he could explain that Sumit Singh was in fact a Sikh, he had been thrown off the motorcycle and shot in the chest.

He tried to rise and his brother tried once again to explain to the attackers that he was a clean-shaven Sikh. They did not listen and a second round of shots snuffed the life out of Shammi. Just two days ago, being a clean-shaven Sikh had in fact saved his life. Returning from Delhi by bus, he was spared by a frenzied mob of Hindus only because he looked like one of them. Barely a few hours before he left his home for the last time, Shammi had joked with his friends about how he had survived the Hindu mob at Panipat. A few hours later his blood-spattered body was brought home.



Sumit Singh: outspoken opposition

There are others, however, who believe that Shammi's death was not a case of mistaken identity but an answer to his bold, acerbic writings. Madan Lal Didi, his father-in-law and general secretary of the Punjab unit of the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), said: "He has paid the price for his boldness. He always criticised the terrorists and did not dither under repeated threats." Added noted Punjabi writer Santokh Singh Dhir: "Another courageous writer has fallen to the guns of inhuman terrorists. What is being practised by a very small section of people from two communities today is sheer fascism."

Perhaps not since the murder of DIG A.S. Atwal in 1983 has the Punjabi conscience been as rudely jolted. Grandson of the famous Gurbaksh Singh Preet Lari, Shammi and his family have long preached Hindu-Sikh amity. His wife Punam comes from a Hindu family. Both had been committed to popular leftist theatre, an interest they pursued with even greater zeal after their marriage. In fact when the news of Shammi's death came, Punam was rehearsing for a forthcoming Punjabi play.

The scars of the incident are deep in the town of Amritsar from where the Preet Lari family came and where they became literary figures, and particularly on the small artists' colony of Preet Nagar which Shammi's grandfather founded. At the cremation ceremony of Shammi, no *ardas* was performed because his young widow said she had lost faith in all religions after her husband was killed in the name of religion. Said Nirupama Dutt, Shammi's friend and a writer: "Yes, this is a blow to all of us people who knew and admired him. But every young man who falls to a fanatic's bullet in our part of the country today is somebody's Sumit."

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Militant youths stop traffic in Panipat: dangerous portents

Said BJP legislator Fateh Chand Vij in Panipat: "We have no discord between Hindus and Sikhs in the town. Most people who indulged in violence here were outsiders. Even Bhimsen Batra, who organised the so-called Haryana Desam, is a commuter from Delhi. We are now initiating joint Hindu-Sikh moves for peace."

The all-party peace committees which lately began functioning in the two states do indeed have a fair bit of credit balance of communal harmony between the two communities to start with, a fact that came to the fore even in the course of the violence. Of the people who tried to extinguish fires in the Panipat gurudwaras there were more Hindus than Sikhs and, incidentally, the gurudwaras too had always had the idols of Hindu gods and goddesses inside. On the Grand Trunk Road, of the body of men who sit on a *dhurrie* in mourning outside the burnt gurudwara all day, a large number are Hindus.

Sikhs who survived the vandalism on the highway recount how Hindu passengers in the buses made them lie flat in the aisle and covered them with their shawls and blankets to deceive the mobs hunting for Sikhs. Similarly, in Punjab, the first men who rushed to the police station at Kahnuwan were Sikhs. Later in the fortnight as the police claimed their first success by capturing three of the four assailants who rained bullets on non-Sikhs in Amritsar's industrial suburb of Cheharta, killing one, they had to thank a mixed crowd of Sikhs and Hindus who courageously chased and cornered the killers even as they fired their Sten guns and heavy .45 calibre pistols.

While the Punjab Government plastered the walls all over the state with posters extolling Hindu-Sikh amity and saying that "finger nails could never be removed from the flesh", the mixed population of the state hardly needed to be reminded of the old ties. The problem, however, was the pressure under which these ties found themselves now as a natural corollary of two years of political chicanery and administrative pussyfooting.

Communal distrust apart, people in the two states were also having their first experience of the problems of living in continuously disturbed situations. For example, most Punjabis have forgotten when they had to last face the prospect of curfew for days together, interspersed with a few tense hours of relaxation. Said Harbans Kaur, a housewife of Jalandhar: "We are going through what we thought was happening in Assam when we read the newspapers last year. Curfew leads to numerous little problems that you could never have imagined. For two decades my husband and I have gone out early every morning to fetch milk from the dairy. Now there is no exercise and we gulp tea made with smelly milk powder." For youngsters of both communities it means losing precious days with the annual examinations round the corner.

Anticipating more trouble, a large number of Hindus in Punjab have sent away their families. So have Sikhs in Haryana. But with the examinations due in March or April this is at best a measure of temporary utility. At the same time the social pressures generated by the discord cannot be underestimated. In the Punjab and Haryana High Court bar room the signs of divide are clear with Hindus and Sikhs seeing less and less of each other and a similar divide has affected other professions including journalism and bureaucracy, making life difficult for everyone.

Yet the trouble has left its mark most tellingly on the economy of the two states, particularly Punjab, which now faces the prospect of losing its pre-eminent position on the country's economic map. The state Government has estimated that the volume of trade has gone down by Rs 1,200 crore which works out to over 15 per cent compared to the average of calmer years. One telling measure of the fall in trade is the reduction in the year's projected sales tax receipts of Rs 285 crore by Rs 45 crore. Even leaving out untaxed trade and pilferages this means a shortfall in business of over Rs 1,000 crore (sales tax is charged at the rate of 4 per cent).

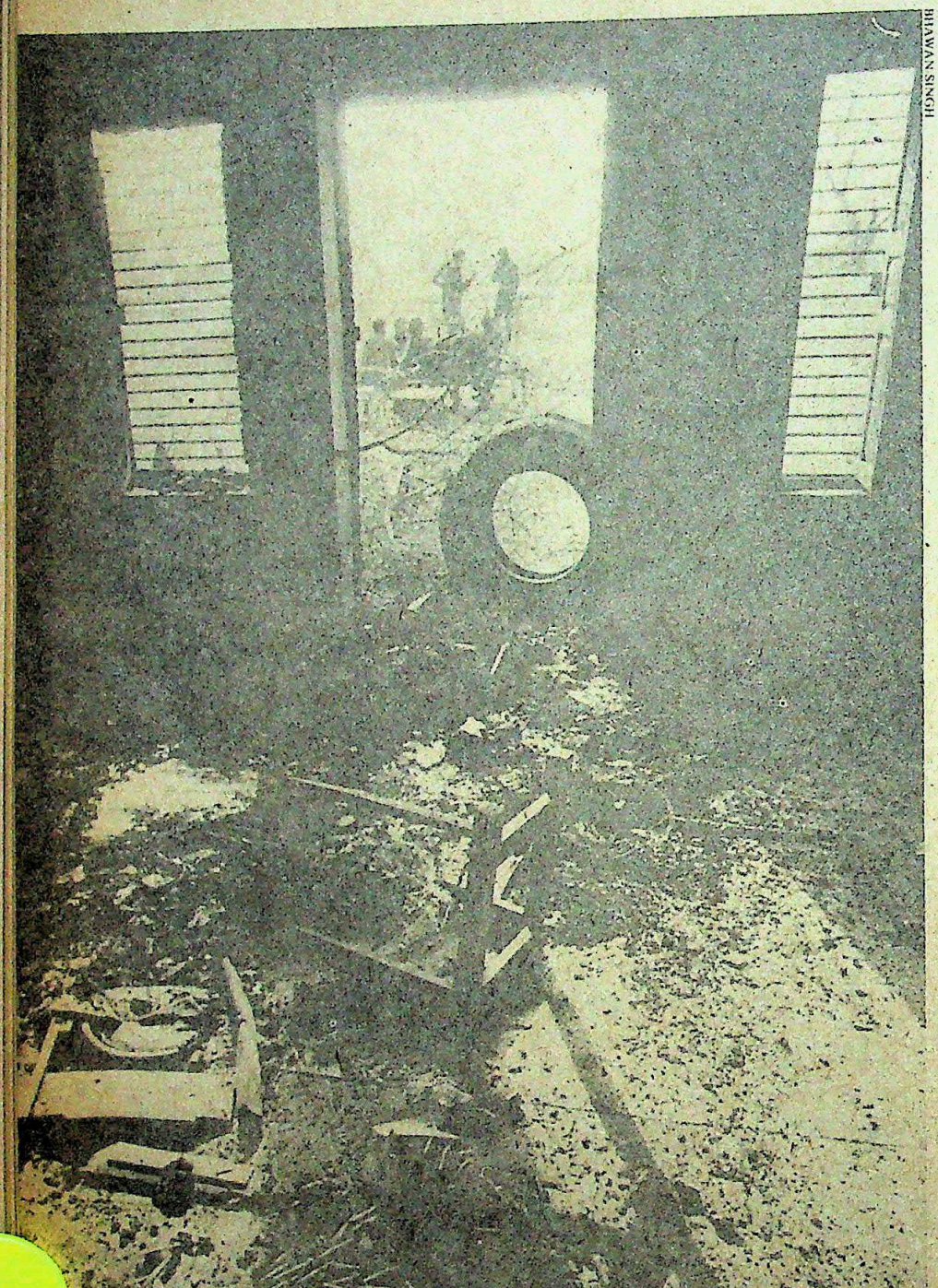
The best of films fail to attract crowds to the cinemas in the evenings even in towns not under curfew and the state Government anticipates a Rs 5 crore fall in its goods and entertainment tax collection this year. The worst-hit district is naturally Amritsar which dominates the country's woollen garments market and used to have a turnover of over Rs 500 crore every year.

The creditworthiness of the businessmen is a big question mark now and transactions take place only in hard cash. Rues Hari Mohan, a trader from the walled city's busy Katra Ahluwalia: "We have virtually no buyers from outside now. Who will come to Amritsar and get killed?" Adds Dilbir Singh, a leading woollen textile manufacturer: "Any thought of normal business is now just out of the question. Who could imagine this kind of situation when the Akali agitation began in August 1981?"

But even more than trade the disturbed

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BHAWAN SINGH

Debris of a looted shop in Panipat: violent reaction

conditions threatened to destroy the state's industrial and agricultural infrastructure which, in the wake of the Green Revolution, has come to rely completely on Hindu and Muslim migratory labour from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. A large number of the victims of the Punjab violence were from this lot and, already, industrial activity in Amritsar and Ludhiana has been hit hard by the exodus of migratory labour. In the steel town of Mandi Gobindgarh, where over 300 steel rolling mills depend entirely on migratory labour, entrepreneurs are offering labourers unprecedented wages of up to Rs 60 a day to stay on. Said Praveen Kumar Gupta, a major industrialist: "How long can we retain them like this? Ultimately they will run away out of fear and the furnaces will die out."

Even greater is the threat to farming. The rabi harvest will be due in a little over a month and with even a small percentage of labour reluctant to come in, the Jat peasant's cup of sorrow will be full. Said Jagat Singh Brar, a farmer from Jandiala Guru near Amritsar and an avid Bhindranwale follower: "As such, farming today is like a dog chewing an old, dry bone and relishing blood oozing out of his own wounded gums. With the *bhaiyas* away it will be a total disaster."

Another hard-hit sector is the state's private truck transport industry which dominates the country. Truckers complain of a 50 per cent fall in load carrying and with the banks wary of even extending the hundi facility; both trade and transport look forward to a bleak future. Further pressure on the economy has been brought about by the additional expenditure of Rs 12 crore that the state Government will have to incur on law and order in the current year in spite of its reduced revenue receipts.

But when it comes to damaging the economy, lawlessness is a double-edged sword which makes no distinction between communities. In Punjab while both Hindu businessmen and Sikh farmers face ruin, the Haryanvi businessman too is in a gloomy mood. Over the years, with the growth of the handloom industry, Panipat had risen on the country's industrial map as a leading garment exporting town. In fact, to the beleaguered entrepreneur in Ludhiana, Panipat offered a lucrative alternative with easier availability of power, proximity to Delhi and a calm law and order situation.

This is no longer so and last fortnight garment entrepreneurs from both cities found themselves at a disadvantage. Following the violence thousands of migratory labourers have fled from Panipat to the neighbouring districts of Uttar Pradesh barely 50 km away across the Yamuna. Said entrepreneur Pramod Kumar: "Even if peace is restored now it will take us months to get

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up as the labour will not return before the end of April after the harvest is over. All we have with us now is the virtually captive Bengali labour which came in last year after the disturbances in Assam. I have myself cancelled Rs 20 lakh worth of export orders for March alone." All along as he talks he is badgered by dealers in Delhi and abroad reminding him of due shipments.

WITH its social fabric in shreds, economy in a shambles and the usual boisterousness and bonhomie on the wane, Punjab last fortnight found itself on the brink of disaster. The Akalis and the newly emerging groups representing the Hindu backlash talked in extreme terms, threatening to make the divide clearer and permanent and while the Government seemed clueless on a strategy to deal with the situation, it had only itself to blame for the present crisis which, if anything, is only a logical turn in the sequence of events that was clear for any clear-minded Punjabi to foresee.

Time and again in the last three years the Government had lost opportunities to restore order in Punjab by making up with the moderates among the Akali ranks. Examples:

▶ The prolonged talks in late 1982 that broke down just when it seemed an agreeable solution had been found with the mediation of Swaran Singh. It was later discovered that the Akalis backed out after the Union Home Ministry made some small but significant changes in the draft agreement after it had been approved in Amritsar.

▶ The Government's failure in acting with purpose when DIG A.S. Atwal was killed at the doorstep of the Golden Temple. If the Government wanted to flush extremists out of the temple premises, that was the best opportunity as the murder was condemned by all Sikhs.

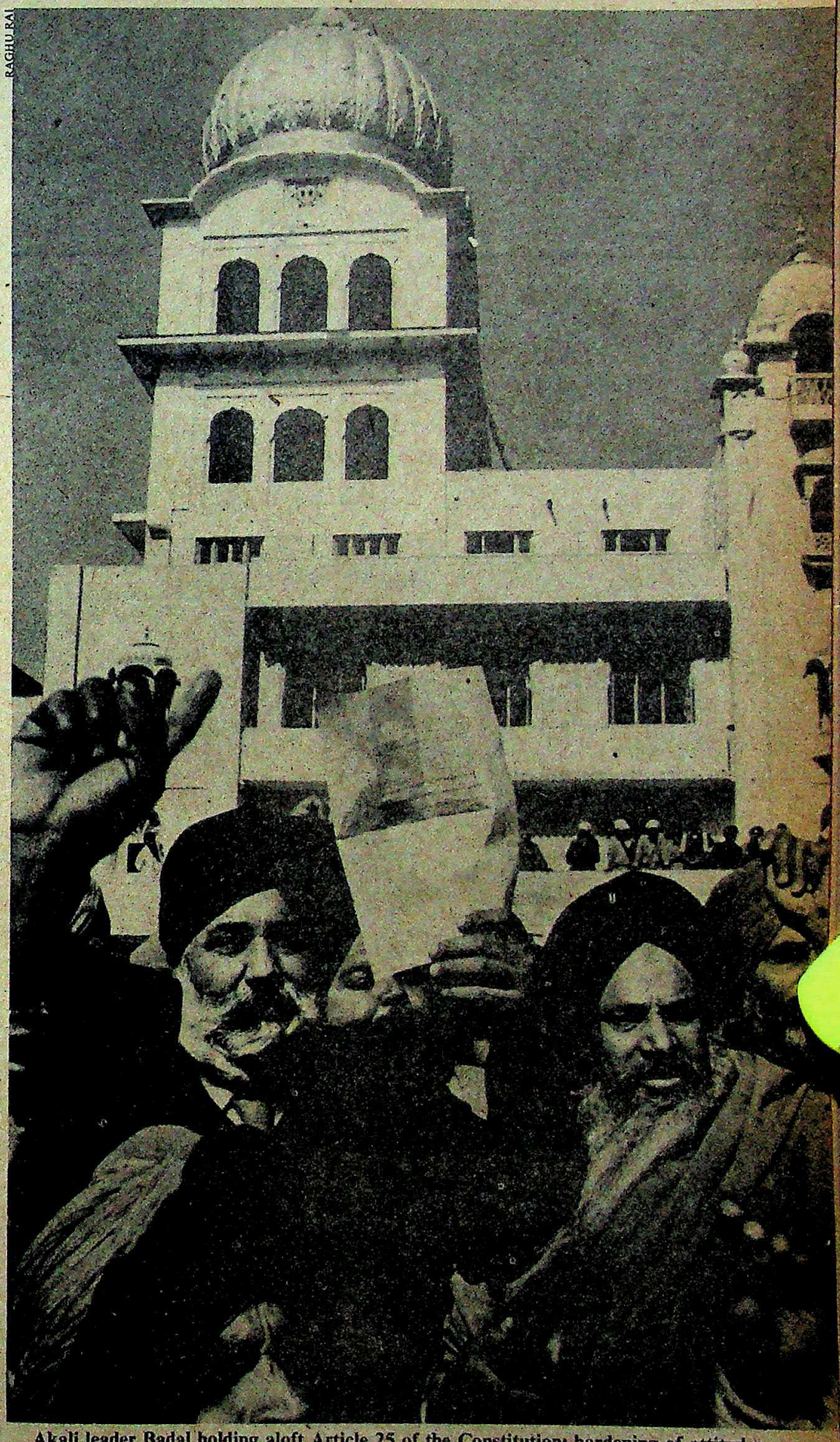
▶ Hesitation is seizing the initiative following the imposition of President's Rule in October 1983 when by and large people's conscience was shaken following the Dhillwan bus killings and the moderates wanted talks.

▶ Home Minister P.C. Sethi's faux pas a month later when he first invited the Akalis for talks and then backed out, losing a lot of credibility in the bargain.

▶ Finally, during the latest round of talks last fortnight when, due to confusion in its handling of the situation, the Government failed to prevent the exchange of fire between the CRPF and armed extremists inside the Golden Temple which continued for nearly six hours; and later the violence in Haryana which could not have taken place had the Government been honestly vigilant.

In fact, while Bhindranwale and his ilk were indeed to blame in large measure for the

RAGHU RAI



Akali leader Badal holding aloft Article 25 of the Constitution: hardening of attitudes

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present crisis the lack of a firm, planned strategy on Punjab in Delhi too has been a major factor. At best, the Centre's trial and errors approach, asking dozens of mediators to try simultaneously for an accord, shuffling bureaucrats and police officers without any rationale (*see box*) and carrying out political somersaults could be likened to Brownian movements—with no pattern or purpose.

Similar arbitrariness later spoiled yet another opportunity last month when the Akalis returned to the negotiating table amid a new mood of optimism. But for some inexplicable reason the Punjab Government underestimated the threat of the bandh call by the Hindu Suraksha Samiti, coinciding with the beginning of the talks in Delhi. With the bandh organisers forcing even Sikh shopkeepers to pull down shutters violence was inevitable.

Even more mysterious was the follow-up in Haryana where unknown organisations followed up with yet another bandh call backing the demand for the release of Hindu Suraksha Samiti leader Pawan Kumar Sharma, an unknown from Patiala till the Government bestowed martyrdom on him by arresting him under the National Security Act. The Akali supporters allege that there was a pattern to the incidents and that Mrs Gandhi organised the Hindu organisations and Bhajan Lal's Government into sabotaging the talks. But this hardly stands to reason and the Centre could, if anything, be blamed for lack of firm action to prevent the situation from being botched up like this.

In fact, around the same time yet another behind-the-scenes effort came to nought when, at a secret meeting organised at the initiative of Janata Party President Chandra Shekhar Akali leaders and Bhajan Lal, instead of getting anywhere near a rapprochement, ended up squabbling angrily. Later, however, political equations too were changing in the two states along queer axes with the Punjab unit of the Congress(I) demanding that Bhajan Lal be sacked and the BJP and the Congress(I) in Haryana suddenly discovering an area of agreement.

Asked if the BJP would demand Bhajan Lal's resignation for failure on the law and order front, state BJP President Dr Mangal Sein retorted: "They (the Akalis) just go on obstinately. So why should we slash our own throats?" Also, with their intransigence on the more communal questions the Akalis had lost the sympathy of the Opposition.

So far the only discernible pattern has been of irrational action in panic. Examples: in the wake of Atwal's murder, Sethi made the hollow threat of entry into the Golden Temple precincts. Then there is the comical "airdashing" of the Union home secretary or sundry factotums to Chandigarh or Amritsar after each major incident of violence—steps that have often been successfully sold to the leading newspapers as indicators of a "decisive posture" or "major initiative".

But among the cynical Punjab population these evoke only derisive laughter. Said former inspector general of Punjab Police Ranjit Singh Grewal: "Is this how they run a state? The Government's style of shuffling officers, rushing in BSF and CRPF there at random only reminds me of a defeated Hitler in Wolf's Lair, shuffling non-existent army units and generals on the map knowing fully well that none of it will happen on the ground. They are just going through the motions."

This is a strong indictment but one that most people in Punjab, Hindu, and Sikh would agree with. In fact, blowing hot and cold for three years the Government has failed to make up with the moderates and firmly put down the extremists. The most eminently logical consequence is that now for all practical purposes, moderates have been reduced to watching the action from the sidelines with the extremists in full cry. Said a bitter Prakash Singh Badal sarcastically: "Yes, Mrs Gandhi has often given us blank cheques. But she never signed them."

Disowned by the Government and derided by the Bhindranwale bunch the so-called moderates are today in an unenviable spot. They were subjected to embarrassing questioning in Amritsar even on the propriety of their having accepted the hospitality of the Haryana police after the latter detained them on their way to Panipat and Karnal on a fact-finding mission after the violence. The stage had been set by derisive coverage in the regional newspapers one of which screamed in a front-page headline: "Akali leaders and Chickens", insinuating that while violence shook Haryana the Akali leaders were eating chicken at the Haryana police's expense.

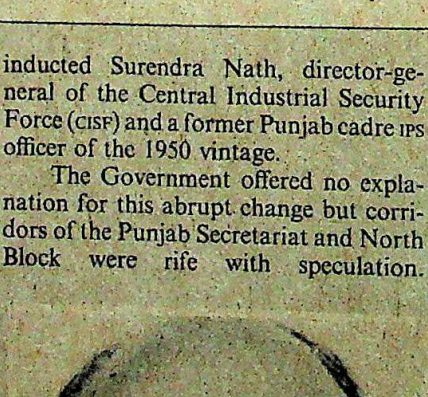
ADMINISTRATION

Musical Chairs

IN PUNJAB, the durability of a bureaucrat running the Government in the face of chronic trouble is no better than that of an Indian batsman facing a battery of hostile fast bowlers. With every major outbreak of violence heads go rolling, giving way to new faces which, too, inevitably meet the same fate. The IAS and IPS officers of the Punjab cadre are getting used to this game of musical chairs. Last fortnight, as panic buttons were pressed yet again in Delhi, the sufferers were senior bureaucrats, whom the prime minister had handpicked just five months ago to help Governor Bhairab Dutt Pandey run the state.

Of the four advisors to the governor, just one, S.S. Sidhu, survives now and he has been looking after the relatively innocuous Health Department. In a swift move that surprised many, the Centre recalled Harbans Singh, who handled the crucial home portfolio and P.G. Gavai. It inducted Surendra Nath, director-general of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and a former Punjab cadre IPS officer of the 1950 vintage.

The Government offered no explanation for this abrupt change but corridors of the Punjab Secretariat and North Block were rife with speculation.



Surendra Nath: troubleshooter

Harbans Singh, it seems, had been rather close to President Zail Singh. He had also shown a rather soft attitude towards the Akalis. On February 15, his statement that the violence of the previous day had been provoked by Hindu agitators, who had called for a bandh, is believed to have sealed his fate.

But as far as the soft-spoken Gavai is concerned, even the more imaginative of the observers fail to offer an explanation for his recall. His only fault seems to have been that he maintained a low profile. Punjab Government spokesmen point out that the governor had some time back asked the Centre to give him a smaller, more compact team for better coordination. Significantly, however, the statement had followed the rather abrupt resignation of G. Jagatpathi, the senior-most among the advisors, in January. While Jagatpathi said he was resigning due to health reasons it is understood that he left when he felt slighted during a discussion with P.P. Nayyar, special secretary in the Union Home Ministry.

Nayyar himself, as well as Home

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"The Sikh to my left is my nephew, the Hindu to my right is my brother whose two sons are Sikhs. Isn't it inconceivable that we will begin slashing each other's throats now? Petty politics has destroyed Punjab. We have no business, so we play cards all day."

—CHARANJIT KUMAR GULATI, Ludhiana shopkeeper

In the process, as moderates weakened, e Akali morcha demands gradually acqui- d communal overtones with the leadership eating the old demands for Chandigarh d river waters into the background and in- ing, first of all, on an amendment to Arti- 25 of the Constitution which calls the khs one of the groups in the larger Hindu mily. This will enable the Sikhs to have a parate personal law.

On this demand even the moderates opted increasingly extreme postures to hose demanding action. Said a nor- ly mild Longowal: "How can you say that Sikhs and Hindus are the same people? You say Sikhs are *keshdhari* (sporting long hair) Hindus. Why don't you call the Muslims *sunnatdhari* (circumcised) Hindus? After all, at some point of time in history they also must have been Hindus." Yet, compared to the known extremist postures this today sounds like a moderate opinion.

With so much lost both the people and the Government face a situation that, barring drastic, sincere measures now, soon threatens to become irretrievable. Bhindranwale and his band are now a bullish lot. Said a police officer in Punjab: "One would like to believe it was unintentional but the events of the past 10 days have made the Akali moderates increasingly irrelevant. They cannot even exercise a restraining influence on the fire-eating fanatics."

Intelligence agencies also brought in reports of arrival of fresh consignments of firearms and ammunition with the extremists who are currently in a process of fanning out in other parts of the state and beyond. Even the usually witty and relaxed, if acerbic, Bhindranwale has lost some of his old calm. Says he, brandishing letters from Sikhs who say they were humiliated in Haryana: "See,

Secretary T.N. Chaturvedi, were removed from the North Block to other jobs as the Government continued its desperate search for miracle-men. Yet another sufferer was C.K. Sawhney, the director-general of the Punjab police who, since the induction of Pritam Singh Bhindar as IGP (law and order) has had little to do other than signing leave applications.

While Sawhney was offered the sinecure of the post of the security advisor to the Industry Ministry, there were indications that Bhindar, in spite of his colossal failure on the law and order front, was in the process of being elevated to the director-general which will make him, a 1957 batch officer, the juniormost in the country at that rank. Said a frustrated Punjab police officer: "There simply is no rationale in all this. You punish a senior officer for no fault other than having been workless. But an outsider with nothing but failure against his name gets out of turn promotions."

If the latest changes failed to cause much of a stir in the Punjab administrative circles, it was only because people have by now got used to such irrational decisions that have marked the Government's functioning for over two years now. The most glaring instance of this was the sudden sacking of the Darbara Singh ministry and the Dhilwan massacre in October 1983. Other examples:

- shortly after an outbreak of violence in mid-1982, chief secretary Ishwar Chandra Puri was sent away;
- a little later, in the wake of DIG A.S. Atwal's murder, the director-general of police Birbal Nath was removed;
- the Dhilwan massacre also accounted for Serbjeet Singh, senior superintendent of Amritsar police who had himself abruptly replaced Surjit Singh Bains two months earlier.

In any case, the posts of the deputy commissioner and police chief in Amritsar have come to be dreaded by almost all officers. They point to the futility and irrationality of it all. Said one: "While in a situation like this you would have expected the Government to have chosen the best of the young lot for the districts: exactly the reverse has happened. Most of the crucial district posts are now in the hands of the promotees who have risen from the ranks and, even if honest, have been mixed up in Akali politics at some stage or the other."

While the Government has confined itself to middle-level officers and the ones on ineffectual posts among the state cadres, most of the changes have affected people brought in from outside by the Centre itself. Asked an officer: "The purpose of President's Rule was to ostensibly tone up the state administration. In five months, the Government has not touched the home secretary, chief secretary, IGP (law and order) and even the SSP of Amritsar, who has been a colossal failure. Only the advisors seem to have got the axe, while the administrative bulwark of the Darbara Singh regime stays firm."

Yet, as many officers themselves explain, it is unfair to impute motives to the Government's actions for it hardly knows what it is doing. What erodes, in the process, is the morale of the administration and its credibility among an increasingly cynical population.

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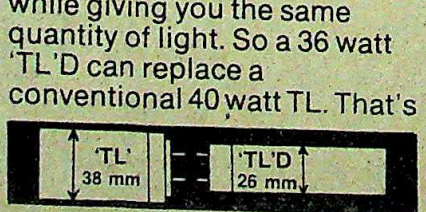
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here is what you mean by Hindu-Sikh unity. The Sikhs know how to protect themselves. We'll show you all."

He tells the Akali moderates in a voice dripping with sarcasm: "For four months my mouth has been shut and motorcycles firmly tethered indoors. See what the Sikhs have got in return." Adds an even angrier Harminder Singh Sandhu, general secretary of the pro-Bhindranwale All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF): "Sikhs know how to die and they also know how to take revenge."

It could perhaps be argued that barring the three-day violence in Haryana the violence has so far been confined to Punjab with Bhindranwale and his men having much to account for. But it is no longer a situation where reasoned arguments hold water. In some measure, with its incompetence, if not connivance, the Bhajan Lal Government in Haryana has given the Punjab extremists something to write home about. The only one who seemed oblivious of this was Bhajan Lal himself as, two days after the killings, he jovially briefed Chandigarh newsmen on "important" decisions taken by the Cabinet that included a hike in country liquor prices and permitting country liquor vends to sell beer "for the convenience of the common man".

Not once did he mention the riots except while denying banner headline in Jalandhar's *Akali Patrika* which alleged that the Haryana Government had disarmed all the Sikhs in its police force. Here was a patently false allegation which in the present atmosphere of distrust and rumour-mongering, many people in Punjab would have believed. Said a senior Haryana bureaucrat: "It will be dangerous if the powers that be are enthused by the thought of the trouble in Punjab being regionalised as a fight between the Punjabis and the Haryanvis. That will, in fact, mean an escalation and yet another step towards a nationwide holocaust."

That was a genuine fear for, if the tensions reached other parts of the country the consequences would be cataclysmic. Warning of the danger *The Tribune* Chief Editor Prem Bhatia said in a signed front-page editorial: "Those who are anxious to update their score-cards should make a note of this danger and halt their disastrous exercise in statistics."

The situation called for positive, firm handling and decisive political initiative. As the Government persuaded the Opposition to put off a debate in Parliament on Punjab, with the underlying promise of "positive action" Mrs Gandhi's statement that the Government could not go on allowing people to use shrines for storing arms and criminal activity was one of the very few indicators of some kind of a rethinking on the issue. But the confusion showed later as Rajiv Gandhi told a group of Congress(I) men in Patna: "The police have entered temples, mosques and gurudwaras in the past. Why can't they do it now? The Kashmir situation may be beyond tolerance but Punjab is not beyond control."

On the positive side the government inducted a new advisor to the governor in Surendra Nath, a serving police officer, originally of the Punjab IPS cadre. Reputed to be the Centre's ace troubleshooter he has had significant positions, first as a police superindent to bust communal gangs indulging in bomb blasts in Delhi in the early sixties, as DIG (CID) and then the IG of police in Jammu & Kashmir for over seven years which included the two wars with Pakistan and, later as chief secretary of the Union Territory of Mizoram shortly after the Mizo National Front guerrillas had raided the police headquarters in Aizawl, killing the IG, a DIG and a superintendent of police. One of his tasks in Punjab will be to liaise effectively with Bhindar to tone up the police force and he does not underestimate the problem. Says he philosophically: "Let me say that in this situation no matter how well we do we will need a lot of help from God."

Sources in the Union Home Ministry said however that a number of recent exercises had shown that the problem had gone beyond a stage where much could be achieved by merely flushing out some extremists in the temple. While the police and paramilitary forces had clearly expressed their inability to even undertake an operation of this variety the commando experts of the army too had detailed the cost it would inevitably have in terms of human lives with doubtful results now that Bhindranwale occupies the Akal Takht.

Yet something drastic will have to be done now for it was months ago that the law of escalating costs and diminishing returns set in on the strategy of attrition. Knowledgeable observers in Punjab feel the Government could take the initiative by at least giving Chandigarh to Punjab and inviting the Akalis for talks on whatever remains and, at the same time being genuinely firm with violence.

As the days go by, the Punjab time-bomb ticks menacingly and before it is too late the Government will have to decide on a judicious course of action somewhere between the extremes of letting things drift and a rash military strike on the Golden Temple. For the consequence of either will be unmitigated disaster and a human tragedy of the like the country has not seen since Partition. —SHEKHAR GUPTA

with GOBIND THUKRAL



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Arms training on the roof of the Guru Nanak Niwas in Amritsar

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TAMIL NADU

Asking for More

THE TAMIL NADU Government's efforts to fill the coffers of Chief Minister's Nutritious Noon Meal Scheme (CMNNMS) and the Chief Minister's Public Relief Fund (CMPRF) reached new heights last fortnight. Begun in November last year to raise donations from the public to keep Rs 130 crore noon meal scheme of Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran going till at least the next parliamentary elections, the drive saw pressed into service all the state's 16 district collectors, 200 officials of the Commercial Taxes Department, all 16 district transport officers and over 50 block development officers.

For those unwilling or unable to donate to the cause, however, life can be difficult. Chandramouli, 35, a typist with a publishing firm, was unable to register for allotment of a flat being built by the Government. Reason: he could not raise the Rs 500 donation to the CMNNMS demanded by the municipal authorities before they would issue him an eligibility certificate. A.M. Natarajan is driving his old car without new registration because he refused to contribute Rs 250 to the CMPRF. Arrack supply to a local dealer was delayed when his employee refused a donation in the absence of his employer.

Opposition leaders protest vociferously. Alleged S. Alagarswamy, Communist Party of India MLA: "In Tamil Nadu today, one has to pay extra for everything from a death certificate to a licence for an arrack blending unit. Without paying the extra money, one can't even drive on the road. All the money is going to be used for political purposes by the chief minister." Adds DMK legislator Rehman Khan acerbically: "The midday meal scheme is an excuse to collect political funds. Large sums have been collected from petty shopkeepers, auto rickshaw drivers and ordinary government employees for political purposes and the Government refuses to disclose the amount raised."

State officials, however, refute the Opposition's allegations that the Government is twisting rules and policies to raise funds. Says J. Anjani Dayanand, secretary, planning and coordination: "The donations are being accepted because we want to raise permanent infrastructure for the noon meal scheme in the state. It is a question of priorities. Once the Government decided that the health of the children had to be ensured, we reworked our priorities to ensure that the money is made available to make it a success." Another official says: "We can assure the people that the money is not being misused. It is going into feeding the kids and other laudable objectives."

Since both the CMNNMS and the CMPRF

SUBHA NEWS



Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran addressing a mass meeting: appealing for funds

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being handled by the chief minister and chief Secretary Chokalingam, strict secrecy has been maintained about the donor's list. While denying the Opposition's allegations that the funds are meant for political use, the officials promise that details about the donations will be disclosed shortly. Opposition leaders, however, persist with their allegations. Said K. Anbazhagan, general secretary of the DMK: "The AIADMK is fleecing the public because the finances of both the Government and the ruling party are in bad shape. Since they can't raise taxes during the elections, they are extorting money by force."

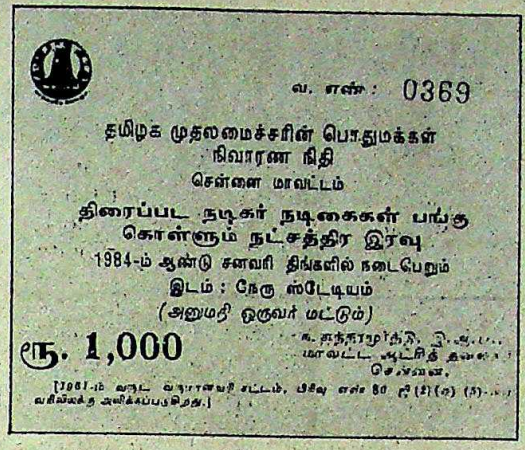
Since contributions to both the noon meal scheme and the CMPRF are beyond the purview of the comptroller and auditor general of India, the state bureaucracy seems to have had no qualms about homing in on its targets. According to opposition leaders, the strategy to raise money through public donations was chalked out in November 1983. At a high level meeting held then to review the financial position of the state it was discovered that the noon meal scheme would collapse if funds were not forthcoming either from the state Government or other sources. The Planning Commission had not conceded the state's plea for the inclusion of the scheme as part of the state's sixth plan.

It was decided at the meeting informally to organise "star nites" in each district, and direct each department dealing with the public to charge a voluntary levy from each citizen for any favour sought by him. It was also resolved that the public should be approached to contribute liberally to the CMPRF. This fund is invariably used by the chief minister at his discretion.

Some important sources of donations to both the CMNNMS and the CMPRF listed by the opposition in the Assembly at various times included outside include the collections from the state's liquor and arrack shop owners, private bus owners, vehicle owners applying for registration, medium scale industries, petty shopkeepers, and private engineering colleges and polytechnics.

Said DMK Rajya Sabha member Murasoli Maran: "Nobody can estimate the total collection because they're collecting money through various agencies in such a manner that they've hardly left any area of administration untouched." State Finance Minister, V.R. Nedunchezhiyan while replying to opposition allegations in the state Assembly denied, however, that donations were being extorted and assured the Assembly that the state Government would submit details of donations soon.

The state Government is relying on both the "star nites" and liquor dealers for massive contributions. District collectors have been directed to sell tickets for the "star nites" in advance without announcing the dates of the extravaganzas. For example, the collector of Madras is selling tickets for one such "star nite" in aid of the CMNNMS, tickets for which cost between Rs 25 and Rs 1,000.


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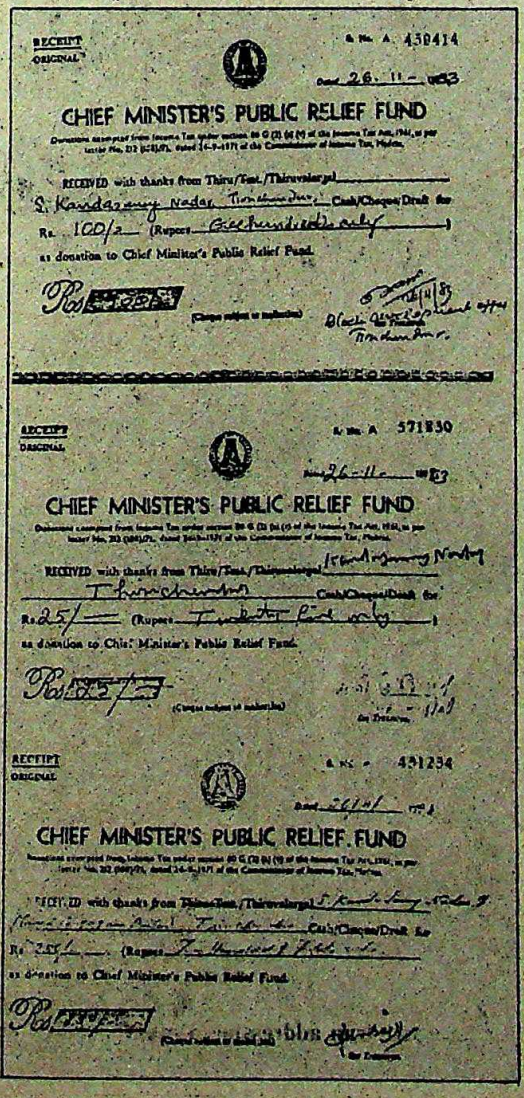
தமிழக முதலமைச்சரின் பொதுமக்கள்
நிவாரண நிதி
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இடம்: நேரு ஸ்டேடியம்
(அனுமதி ஒருவர் மட்டும்)

ரூ. 1,000

A 1,000 ticket sold in February for a show in January 1984

Receipts for three separate donations by one person in the course of a day


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A No. 451234 dated 26/11/1983

Though the show was to be held in January, it has now been postponed till March. District officials have been told to ensure that the Rs 50 lakh target for collections is achieved.

The donations are exempt from income tax, and state officials expect to sell all the tickets before the financial year ends on March 31. Admitted an arrack tycoon in Madras: "We are caught between the devil and the deep sea. If we don't give, our vends will be raided, and if we contribute enormously, we will have to account for where we got the money from in our income statements."

Though the liquor dealers have caved in easily, the district officials have had to use pressure on the people to reach their targets. For example, in Tiruchendur, Kandaswamy Nadar, a Congress(I) leader who runs a small shop was forced to give donations thrice in one day to three different state government officials—a block development officer, a Commercial Tax Department official and an inspector from the Health Department.

But the maximum contribution, after the liquor trade, seems to have come from private bus operators who have received a fresh lease of life from the state Government. According to an ordinance promulgated recently, the Government diluted its earlier policy of nationalisation of bus routes in a phased manner. In 1973 the DMK government headed by the then chief minister K. Karunanidhi had passed the Tamil Nadu State Carriages and Control Carriages Acquisition Act, 1973, under which all private bus routes in the state were to be nationalised by 1978. The act specifically stated that no new permits would be granted to any private companies. This was challenged in the court by the bus owners, but after 10 years of litigation the Supreme Court in November 1983 upheld the validity of the act.

Soon after the judgement, the bus operators sent representations to the state Government seeking an amendment to the earlier act so that they could continue their business. Since the earlier act prohibited the renewal of private licences after three years, a fresh ordinance was issued which not only diluted the Government's avowed objective of phased nationalisation but also permitted the renewal of bus permits held by small operators owning five or fewer buses. This was done, opposition leaders allege, after the bus owners had agreed to contribute liberally to both the CMNNMS and CMPRF.

According to transport circles, there are over 4,500 private buses plying in Tamil Nadu and their owners agreed to contribute Rs 6,000 per bus for the current financial year. Even some opposition MLA's who own buses paid to keep themselves in business.

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Government even agreed to permit pri- buses to ply on routes on which state- buses are losing heavily. According to latest budget estimates, the nine state-run nsport corporations are losing Rs 20 crore to uneconomical routes. Said Arcot Vee- samy, a DMK MLC, "MGR is even betraying socialist ideals of Anna in whose name he ks the people's mandate to run the Go- rnment. The MGR Government has nded over everything from transport to ucation to the avaricious private sector."

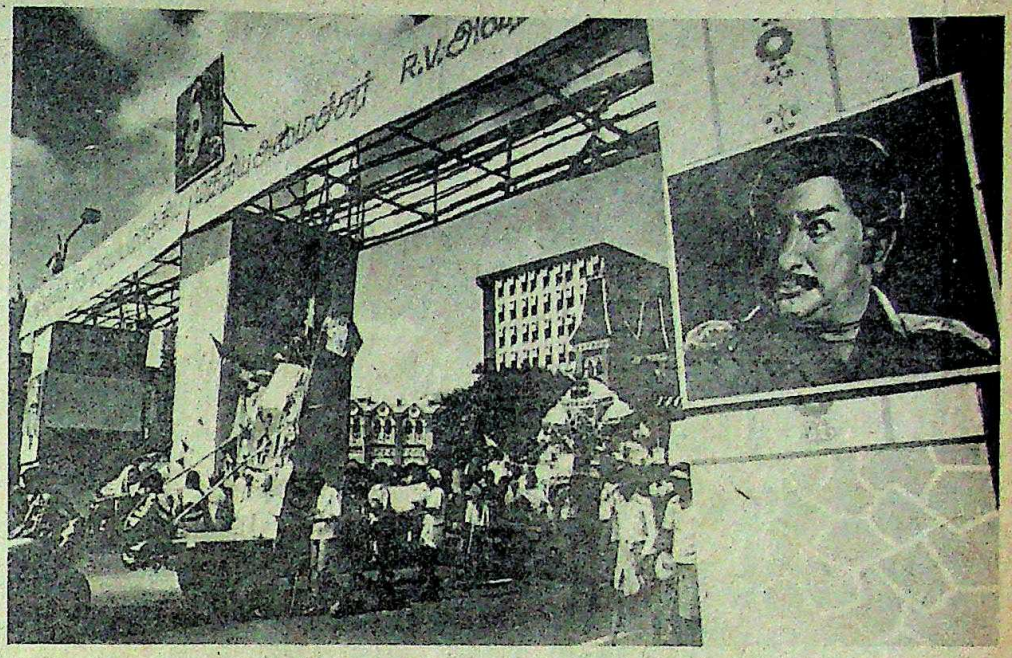
Opposition leaders also allege that the Government has recently reversed its icy of not allowing private organisations engineering colleges and polytechnics. t month the state Government announ- that from the next academic session a few ivate polytechnics and engineering colle- s with 100 to 200 seats each will be opened. e the private colleges charge capita- n-cum-tuition fees—Rs 15,000 for engi- ring colleges and Rs 5,000 for a polytech- admission—all of them will make about crore a year. The state Government alle- ly agreed to encourage the private institu- ns only after they had agreed to donate to CMPRF.

The decision to exploit the public for ntributions to schemes which are prima- either political in nature or run by the vernment is directly linked with the sta- poor finances and the coming elections. t month, Tamil Nadu had an over- t of Rs 112 crore, the bulk of which had e to support the CMNNMS—and Finance nister Pranab Mukherjee had directed the not to release plan assistance to any state h an overdraft.

In addition, Planning Minister S.B. avan made it clear that his ministry would release plan assistance to the state unless ised its own internal resources. The mil Nadu Government, however, is rai- more money for the CMPRF than for the NMS which is part of the state budget. additional stress on contributions to the re has caused a political storm.

But the Government is seeking to over- the resentment its fund-raising drive cised by projecting a rosy picture of the crete benefits to ensue. Planning Secre- Dayanand says that during 1983-84 3,000 meal centres are to be constructed a cost of over Rs 12 crore, primarily ough public donations. And by 1986-87 the 27,846 meal centres will have perma- t structures. With each centre costing Rs 00 the Government will have to raise a opping Rs 130 crore for buildings alone. the bureaucracy's success in the current d-raising campaign is any indication, ho- r, MGR's Government will have suc- ed in achieving at least one target.

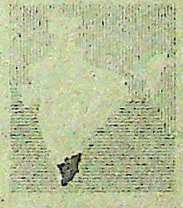
—PRABHU CHAWLA in Madras



The Ganesan cavalcade: high-profile politics

TAMIL NADU

Enter the Hero



IN TAMIL NADU, political history is invariably made on Mount Road, the 18-km artery that bisects Madras. In the past the road has been the scene of many political processions that proved turning points in the state's mercurial, high-profile politics. The event last fortnight that held up traffic all over the metropolis for over six hours was of this category.

Going by the shock waves it sent down the ranks of the ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and also a section of the Congress(I), the show could rank among the most significant in the past two decades. It signalled the arrival of yet another tinsel hero, Sivaji Ganesan backed by all of his 9,000 fan clubs with a membership of over half-a-million.

The 16-km procession, complete with outriders dressed as famous Tamil freedom fighters, floats, bullock-carts and dance troupes marked the beginning of a two-day convention of his fan clubs which was nothing but a masquerade by pro-Sivaji elements within the state Congress(I) to get him to take over the leadership of the party in Tamil Nadu.

Notably, even as hordes shouting slogans like "Sivaji is Congress and Congress is Sivaji" and "Brother Sivaji is next chief minister," gathered for the conference, smiling benignly onstage were Union Defence Minister R. Venkataraman, former Union deputy ministers R.V. Swaminathan and Arvind Balapazhanoor and former TNCC(I) president M.P. Subramaniam. Equally notable absentees were the present TNCC(I) President M. Palaniyandi and even more significantly, G.K. Moopanar, AICC(I) general secretary. Their absence only confirmed the new alignments in the state Congress(I) politics with Venkataraman and his protégés ganging up against Moopanar and his favourite Palaniyandi.

But even more than the realignments within the party the event signalled the arrival of yet another film hero on the southern political stage following close on the heels of NTR, Prem Nazir and to an extent Rajkumar. His powerful supporters in the Congress(I) made no secret of the fact that he was their candidate for chief minister in the next election. Said a pro-Sivaji legislator, not willing to be quoted: "We have realised now there is no defeating a film star without the help of another. And even if Sivaji has just 9,000 fan clubs against MGR's 30,000 he will be a surer bet at the hustings than the faceless, uninspiring leaders we have had so far."

Sivaji himself was more guarded in his optimism. Said he: "My work for the Congress(I) is not guided by any longing for office. I just propose to dedicate myself and *manrams* (fan clubs) to the cause of rebuilding and revitalising the Congress Party in Tamil Nadu. I have no interest in factionalism which, I think, is caused by inaction." He adds as an afterthought: "My ambition is to serve with loyalty. I could die doing it for Mrs Gandhi."

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MGR: the ruling star



Moopanar: upstaged

The event signalled the arrival of yet another film hero on the southern political stage following close on the heels of NTR, Prem Nazir and to an extent Rajkumar.

The move was no sudden stratagem thought out by Venkataraman and his supporters and had blessings from the top. Three months ago when Rajiv Gandhi visited Madras he chided partymen for drifting complacently in the false sense of security provided by their alliances with one Kazhagam or the other since 1967. Immediately, Venkataraman took the cue and approached Sivaji who had been wavering on the edge for some time.

While political observers in Madras say Sivaji's appearance on the scene has more to worry MGR than Moopanar or any of the other lesser mortal both MGR and Sivaji were at pains to profess strong bonds of friendship and fraternity that they claim exist between them. Less than a fortnight before Sivaji's consecration the two had met at a function, embraced each other and announced that there was never any question of their crossing swords in the political arena for "blood is always thicker than water".

But observers point out that in that case Sivaji would be no use to the Congress(I) high command. His supporters made no secret of their objective. Said V. Rajasekharan, legislator and general secretary of the All India Sivaji Ganesan Fans Association: "Moopanar is no leader and Palaniyandi is merely his yes-man. Sivaji is a leader like Kamaraj and Mrs Gandhi. He will soon make Congress(I) the main opposition to the AIADMK, leaving the destructive DMK behind."

On the face of it MGR should have had no reason for anxiety because he undoubtedly has a much larger fan following. But of late there have been rumblings of discontent within his own party. A strong group within his Cabinet resents his grooming fellow film star Jayalalitha as his heir apparent.

The dissidents welcomed the move [illegible] threatened to cut into at least Jayalalitha's support base if not MGR's. Said a rebel in the Cabinet: "It is indeed good that someone like Sivaji, with a large following of loyal and trusted supporters has entered the political arena of the state."

Besides, MGR also faces the prospect of Karunanidhi mobilising the national Opposition by organising the next opposition conclave in Madras. MGR is trying to counter the move by wooing the left parties. It is in this context that Sivaji's emergence could prove to be more than a minor irritant.

For Vettai Chiniaiah Ganesan, nicknamed "Sivaji" by the father of the Dravidian movement E.V. Ramaswami "Periyar", his return to political centre-stage also marks a complete reversal of political fortunes after nearly three decades of oblivion when he was banished from Dravida Kazhagam politics following his marriage in Tirupati. The party leadership virtually excommunicated him and it signalled his turning into a believer.

He is back on the scene now with a vengeance. Dravida Kazhagam politics is now no longer as intensely chauvinistic as it was 30 years ago. Nor is its hold as strong as it was a decade ago. Sivaji's supporters repeatedly make mention of the fact that Sivaji was one of the three men who made *Parasakthi*, the film that heralded the Dravidian revival in the early '50s. The other two, C.N. Annadurai and M. Karunanidhi became chief ministers. History evidently is on Sivaji's side. But the future will depend on how well he is able to fathom the art of Congress realpolitik.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA and K.N. RAGHAVENDRA

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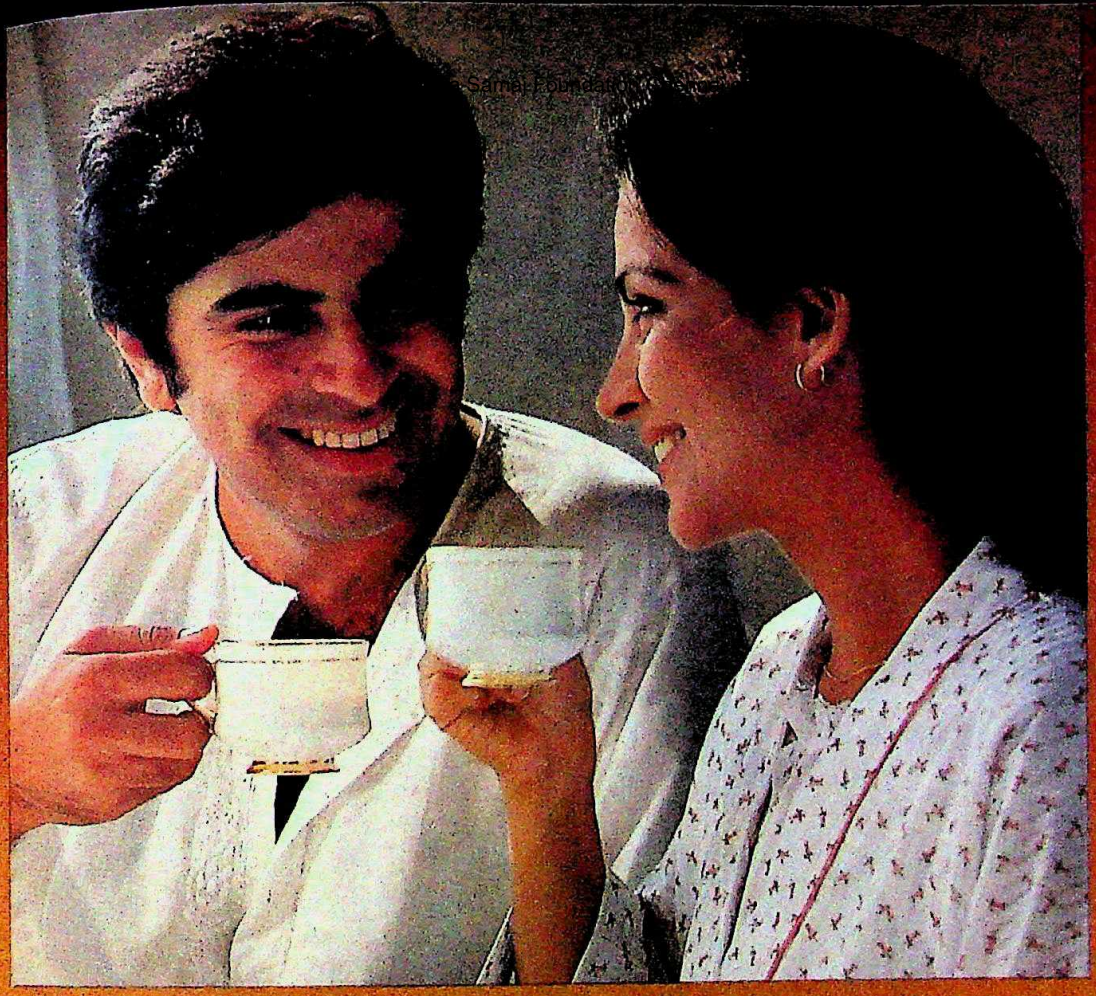
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also very good
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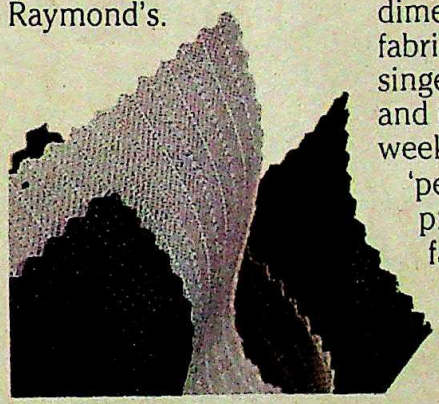


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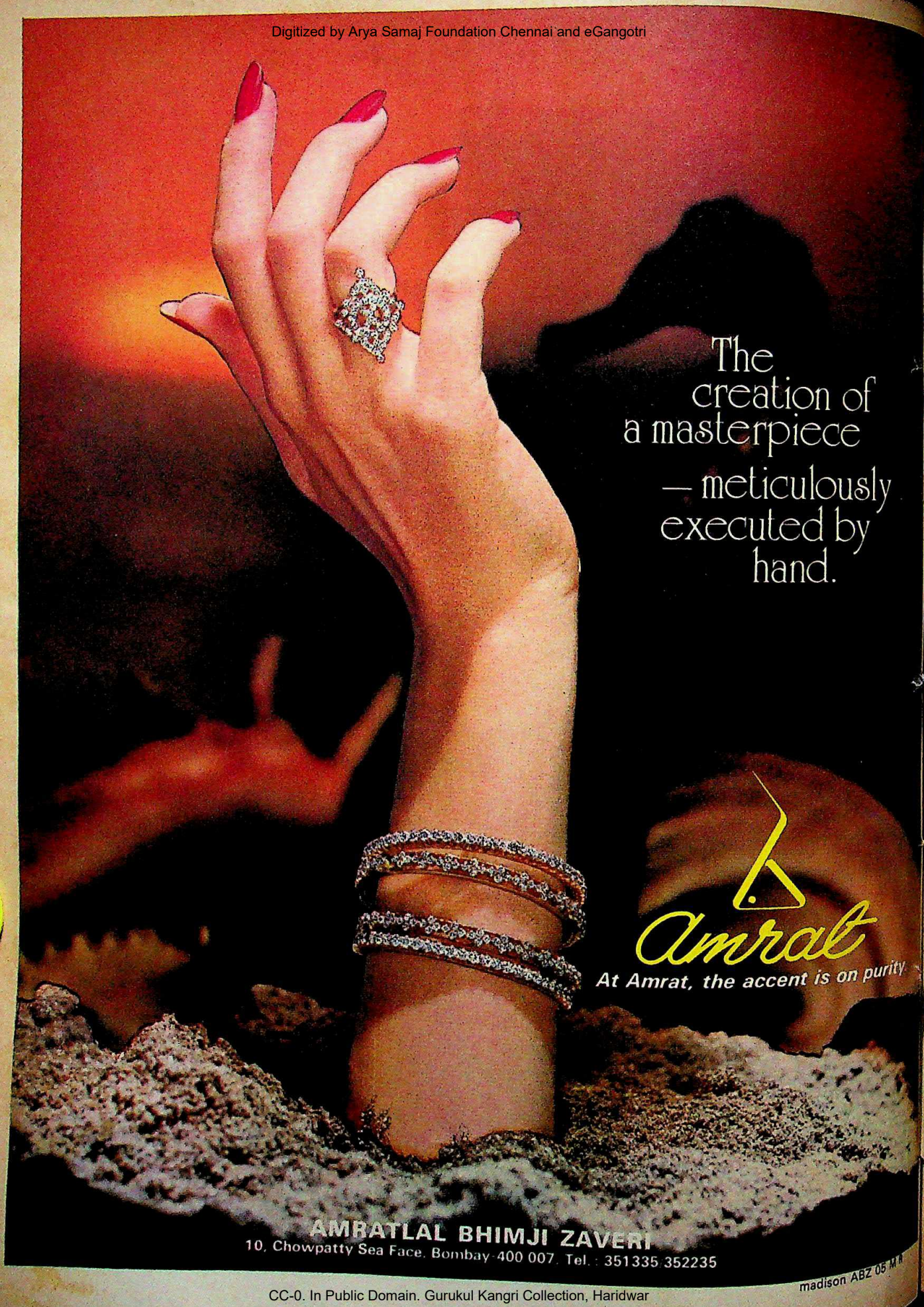
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TRIPURA

A Border Breach



SITUATED 110 km north of Agartala and right on the border with Sylhet district of Bangladesh, Chandannagar village is one of the oldest in Tripura's Kamalpur subdivision. The prosperous village received a further boost last year when it was informed it would soon have electricity. But the work was abandoned and the bubble burst when officials informed the village late last year that it now belonged to Bangladesh and would have to be handed over.

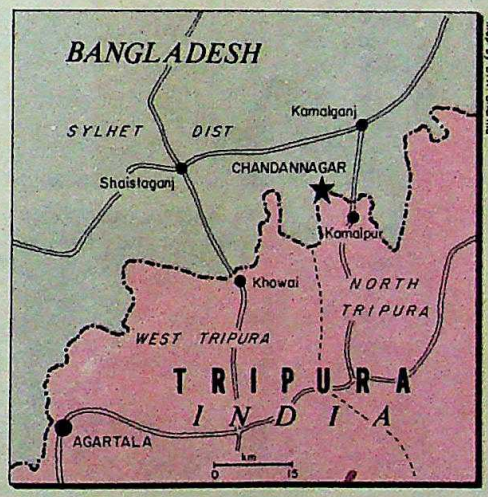
That news has brought in its wake a determined bid to resist the transfer. Nearby Kamalpur town is plastered with hand-written posters in Bengali saying: "We will shed blood to keep Chandannagar in India", and protest demonstrations are held almost daily. The villagers fail to understand how they have become Bangladeshis overnight, and have formed a Save Chandannagar Committee whose President, Santimoy Deb, said last fortnight: "We belonged to the native state of Tripura and there are documents proving that we paid revenue to the maharaja. If after partition the entire state of Tripura came within the Indian Union, then how come after all these years a single village is being adjudged to be the property of Bangladesh?"

To stress that they are actually Indian citizens, the villagers point to a pillar put up in 1947 to demarcate the border with the erstwhile East Pakistan. That pillar had been put up along the Morichhara stream, which has since dried up. And there lies the rub —for a part of the circular stream is still alive and running behind the village. After the creation of Bangladesh, when the two countries sought to clear up various border tangles, Bangladesh maintained that this stream constituted the international border, and this was acknowledged in the Indira-Mujib agreement.

But there was no move to implement the new understanding. A technical point also stood in the way, as it had been agreed that the agreement would have to be ratified by the parliaments of both countries. Last week however, a formal announcement of the transfer of the village to Bangladesh was made in the Indian Parliament.

Earlier, the Indian Government had tried to play a stalling game aided by the Tripura Government, whose chief minister had come out with a suggestion that instead of taking populous Chandannagar, Bangladesh could take a similar plot of uninhabited land from elsewhere in the state. However, with the announcement of the transfer of the village, the fate of the 388-odd villagers has been irrevocably sealed. The chief minister has now assured them that he would make arrangements for their rehabilitation elsewhere in the state—in other words, they would become refugees.

This is precisely what irks the villagers most. Asks Santimoy Deb: "Along with members of my family I crossed over into Tripura as a refugee from Brahmanbaria in Comilla district at the time of partition. Now I am being told that I will have to become a refugee once again. Is this justice?" There is not a single Muslim in the entire village and if and when Chandannagar goes to Bangladesh it will be the only village in that Islamic republic where none of the population adheres to the official faith.



Map by B.K. Sharma


P. DEV KUMAR

Villagers at a meeting at Chandannagar: resisting the move

Pointing to a long row of bushes in the north, just a stone's throw from his house at Chandannagar, 90-year-old Ram Sundar Kumar says: "Beyond that is the Champara tea estate in Bangladesh where some of my relatives still live. They sometimes manage to cross over and bring with them harrowing tales of what life is like for a Hindu on the other side." These tales have predictably led to villagers of Chandannagar forming a nightmarish picture of Bangladesh.

The sense of being abandoned goes further. Formerly there used to be a Border Security Force (BSF) camp on the outskirts of the village, which has now been withdrawn and taken to Morichhara some 5 km away. The villagers now have to fend for themselves in matters of law and order. Said Ram Avatar Kumar, secretary of the Save Chandannagar Committee: "At night we have to organise our own border patrols as of late there has been a marked rise in dacoities from across the border. We have watchdogs and several of them have died in the last month and we suspect that they had been fed with poisoned meat by dacoits from the other side." The BSF's contention that the camp had been shifted for locational advantages falls on totally unreceptive ears in Chandannagar.

Fear has also gripped Morichhara village. If Chandannagar goes to Bangladesh then the border will come closer to the village and it will be exposed to the dangers that now stare Chandannagar in the face. The BSF also would not like the transfer for similar reasons. Said a BSF officer in Agartala: "It will bring the border dangerously close to the subdivisional headquarters of Kamalpur and that is something that is always to be avoided."

Not only do they not want to be any part of Bangladesh, the villagers are also determined not to agree to any resettlement in tribal villages because as one of them puts it, "these are hotbeds of extremist activities and for us it will be like jumping from the frying pan into the fire."

The fear of being turned into refugees has also suddenly made the villagers very aware of unkept promises and they tend to tie these to the assumption that "nobody is interested anymore in us." The facts they refer to in support of this are:

- The promise of a bridge across the Morichhara made three years ago by the chief minister is yet to materialise.

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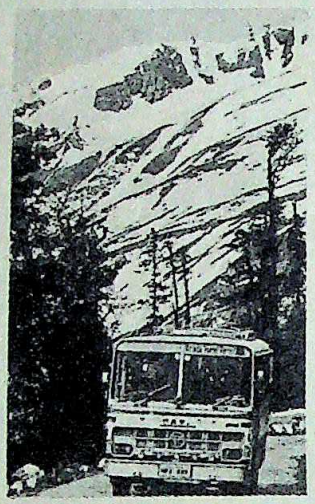
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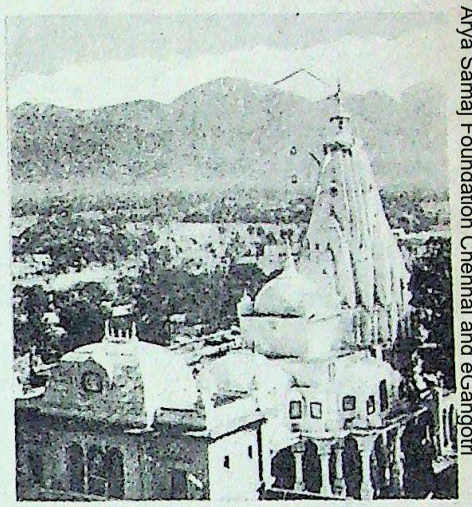
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• Since Independence only two tubewells have been sunk in all the 133 acres of village land, which are not enough to meet the villagers' needs.

• There are no primary schools in the villages and children have to trek to the Barasurma junior basic school.

The issue has been taken up in earnest in the state only by the Janata Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party, which have very limited strengths in Tripura. The two major parties, the CPI(M) and the Congress(I) are sympathetic to the cause but are proceeding cautiously.

These intricacies of realpolitik appear totally meaningless to the villagers, whose theme song these days is: "We are not interested in either Congress or communist politics. In this battle for survival we want the support of all." But such support, even if received, can do little to alter the fact that the decision can be changed only if Bangladesh agrees to an alternative plot of land. Judging by current trends, Bangladesh is unlikely to give up its claim and till then, the fate of Chandannagar hangs in delicate balance.

—SUMANTA SEN in Chandannagar

INSURGENCY

Rebel Trouble

A MAJOR breakthrough in the battle against extremists in the Northeast occurred in the Ambasa region of north Tripura last fortnight with the arrests of Biswa Koloi and Birat Hrangkhawl, both notable members of the Tripura National Volunteers (TNV), the armed extremist organisation headed by Bejoy Hrangkhawl. The two men were nabbed as they were paying a visit to Padmamani Hrangkhawl, father-in-law of Bejoy, who was also detained. Claiming the arrests were significant, Tripura's Inspector General of Police(IGP), C.Z. Gafoor, said: "We have stepped up our vigilance in the area now. It appears that after a lull, the extremists are preparing for a major showdown."

On the surface, the Ambasa area differs little from any other in the state, but to intelligence officials it has acquired special significance as the principal haven of the TNV. It was from Kamalchhora village in Ambasa that Bejoy had escaped with his wife Lindia, embarrassing the state Government, which had been maintaining that Bejoy had given up his extremist ways, and on whose "rehabilitation" it had spent a lot of public money.

Of the two arrested, Biswa Koloi, 25, is known to be exceptionally desperate, having been allegedly involved in the murders of 10 security-men and civilians in the past couple of years. A self-styled sergeant in the TNV, Koloi is also believed to have led the raid on the Lafunga police outpost, 13 km north-west of Agartala, last December during which one constable was killed and three rifles and 150 rounds of ammunition were stolen. For his daredevil deeds he was amply rewarded by the TNV.

Koloi's comrade Birat seemed made of softer stuff. He joined the TNV as a "private" and was given the job of courier—he was nabbed when delivering a sweater to Padmamani from his daughter Lindia. The police found him easy to handle. According to an official: "While Koloi is a tough nut to crack, Birat has been answering all our questions."



Bejoy Hrangkhawl (left) with fellow TNV officer: under pressure

The answers to some of these questions reveal that life for the extremists is becoming increasingly arduous. According to the police: "There is always a shortage of food for the 230 men and it appears that their hosts, the outlawed Mizo National Front, is becoming increasingly tight-fisted about sharing food and arms." These days the TNV frequently sends out members to collect subscriptions, and a subscription book found on the two rebels showed receipts in the name of the TNV had been given to villagers whose donations ranged from Rs 5 to Rs 1,000 as well as gifts of rice. Senior police officials maintain that the villagers have no choice but to make donations as any denial would invite only death in this border area which is largely unmanned by security forces.

The police on the other hand say the BSF has always tended to minimise the extremist threat. Perhaps the BSF would have continued with that attitude but for the February 1 attack on one of its patrols about 15 km from Chhamini thana in which four men were killed. Following the February 1 incident, the BSF went in for a massive combing operation in the entire north district, which, though it did not flush out any extremists, did succeed in bringing about a BSF-state Government confrontation. One of the first things the BSF had done was to arrest a village gram pradhan on the suspicion that he was an agent of the extremists. The gram pradhan, however, was a member of the ruling CPI(M), and there soon came an angry protest from Chief Minister Nripen Chakraborty that in the guise of flushing out extremists the BSF was "torturing and harassing" innocent villagers. The BSF denied this, and all that IGP Gafoor would say was: "We have received some complaints and the superintendent of police, north district, is looking into them."

The Government continues to lay greater emphasis on its policy of "winning over the rebels", as opposed to dealing with them primarily as a law and order problem. Citing the cases of Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur, Chief Minister Chakraborty says: "In none of these places has it been possible to tackle the problem with security men alone, and it won't be possible in Tripura either." The chief minister would not admit that his gambit with Bejoy Hrangkhawl had failed. He still maintains that Bejoy was kidnapped by other extremists, although all available evidence clearly points toward the fact that he is now very much in charge of the TNV.

Chakraborty is now placing a great premium on the surrender of Binonda Jamatiya and his group of 230. These men have had many cases against them, including some for murder, which have now been withdrawn. They are being plied with cash assistance of Rs 10,000 plus cattle and other forms of aid and details of this lavish treatment are being spread to the tribal areas to lure more of the underground into surrender. But current events do not indicate any softening of attitudes among the people of the hill tracts.

As for the surrender of Jamatiya and his men, a police officer explained: "They had no other option as they had fallen out with Bejoy and, with fewer arms in their possession, they would surely have been massacred if they had remained in the jungles. Jamatiya did not surrender because he had lost faith in the extremist cause." It therefore remains to be seen whether the state Government's 'carrots' are more potent than the 'stick' which a majority of security officials advocate.

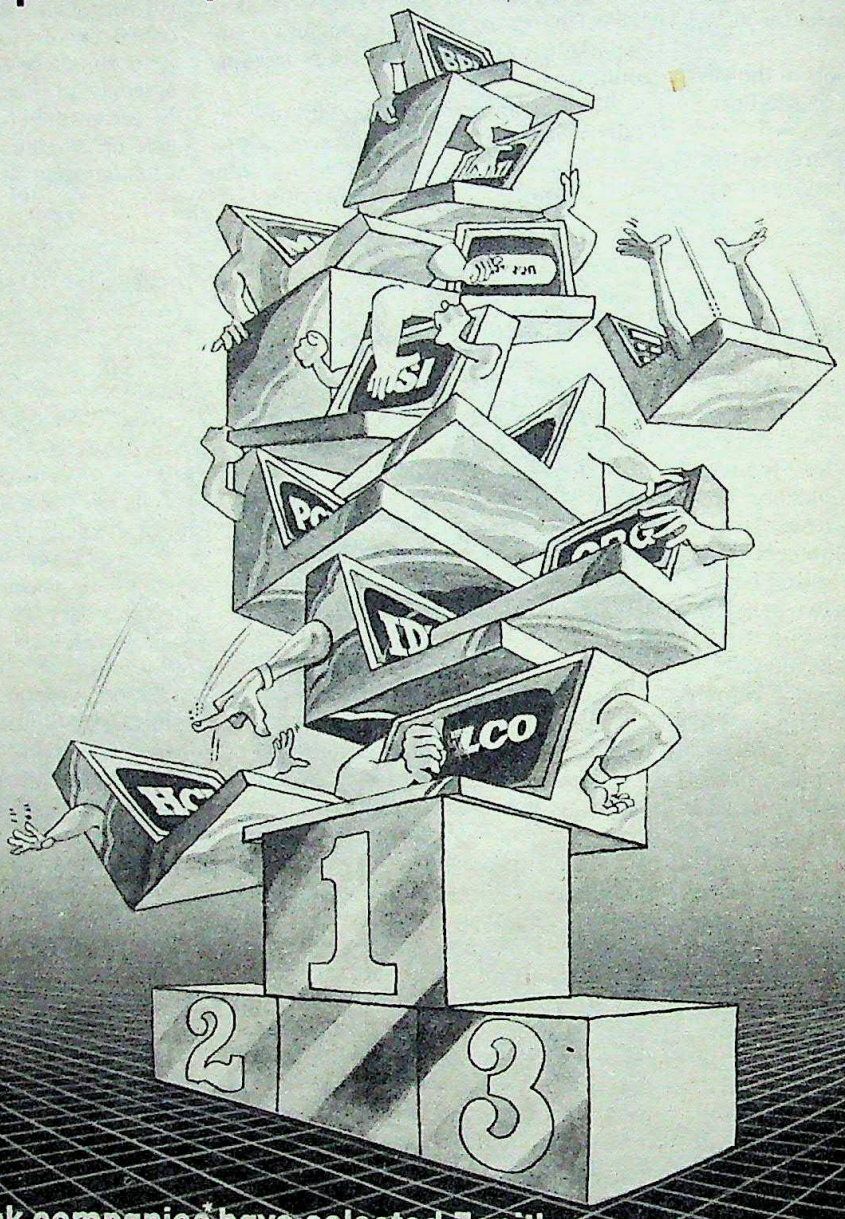
—SUMANTA SEN

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MAHARASHTRA

Food for Thought



THE STRATEGY is ominous. Farmers from at least 10 states have decided to present the Government with an ultimatum: if they are not granted remunerative prices immediately, they will stop selling grain to the markets. At a conference of farmers' organisations held in Maharashtra's Parbhani town last fortnight, Sharad Joshi, the leader of the state's Shetkari Sanghatana, asked farmers to grow enough foodgrain to meet only the needs of their families and not to sell anything to the market. Their slogan: "*Jo hamse takarayega bhookh se mar jayega* (Those who oppose us will starve to death)."

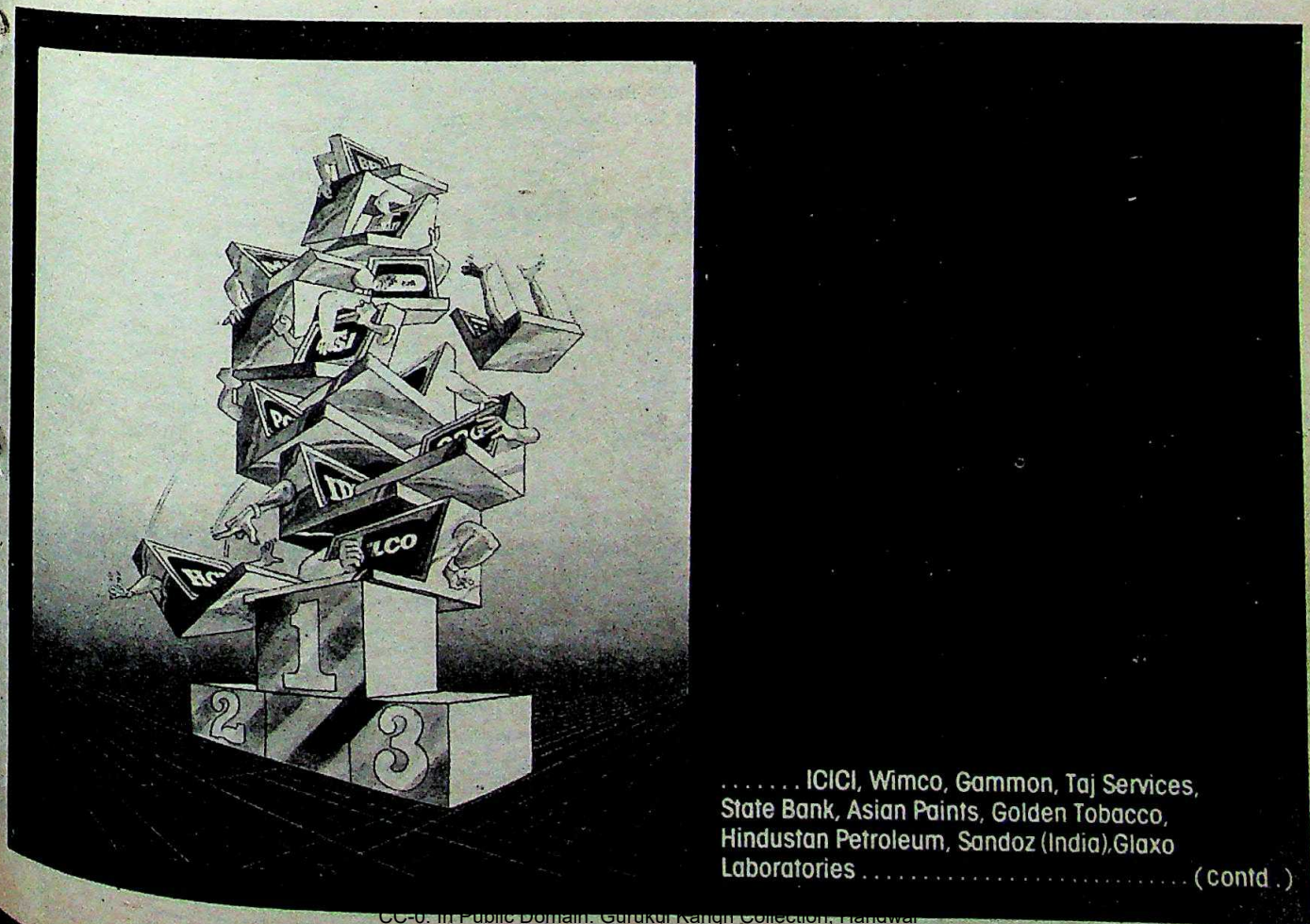
The farmers believe they have struck at the right moment. The coordination committee feels that the Government is in no position to import foodgrains as it does not enjoy a particularly favourable credit status abroad. Moreover, as farmers stop delivering wheat to the mandis, they will force the state and Central governments into a tight corner at the strategic moment—just before the polls.



Nasik farmers behind banner restricting politicians' entry without their permission

The 15,000-odd delegates responded enthusiastically to Joshi's call and Balbir Singh, the general secretary of the Indian Farmers Union, stirred them up further with the example of his home state Punjab where such tactics had been tried successfully.

Other protest measures suggested by the committee included putting up hoardings on the roads leading to villages that would say: "No admission without permission to ministers and political leaders" and "No admission to bank loan recovery officers at any cost". For long, complained farmers, have politicans turned a deaf ear to their demands.



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PLAGIARISM

Title Fight

IT IS, quite literally, the title fight of the year. Both contenders are heavyweights in their own right. In one corner, Sahitya Akademi Award winner and authoress Krishna Sobti. In the other, the no less formidable Jnanpith Award Winner, Punjabi poetess Amrita Pritam. The stake money: Rs 1.5 lakh that Sobti last fortnight claimed as damages from Pritam for having allegedly plagiarised one of her book titles.

On the face of it, Sobti's case seems far from cast-iron. Her book, written in 1979, was titled *Zindaginama* (loosely translated as biography or story of). Pritam's effort, published much later, is called *Har Dutt Da Zindaginama* based on the life story of Har Dutt, a freedom



Sobti (left) and Pritam: book battle

fighter. "Zindaginama can be on Har Dutt or anybody else," she scoffs, dismissing Sobti's claim, "there can be a thousand different books, each one a different person's zindaginama." She also rattles off the names of dozens of books that have been written by different authors but with the same title. Examples: *Khushboo, Siddhartha, Shivaji, Ramayan* and *Kala Gulab*. All these, she says, have gone unchallenged.

Sobti, however, sticks by her stand. "I have asked for court protection because *Zindaginama* was the first of a trilogy that I plan." The trilogy, she says, is not a biography but traces events in undivided Punjab between 1900 and the First World War.

But the spark was obviously kindled by an advertisement for Pritam's book which appeared in an Urdu film magazine. In it, Pritam's book was referred to as *Zindaginama*. The ambiguity probably stemmed from the fact that the jacket flap of the Urdu edition of Pritam's book also carries the abbreviated title, though the cover bears the full title as does the original Punjabi edition. It is now up to the courts to try and answer the age-old question of what's in a name.

—PRABHA DUTT

In addition, the Sanghatana would support no political party as elections, in its picturesque phrase, are much like asking cows to select butchers for their own slaughter. Joshi told the gathering: "1984 is the last chance to get your demands conceded. This is going to be the year of financial independence of the farmers as the politicians will have to accept your demands if they are driven to the wall."

To turn the screws further, farmers will not buy tractors, diesel or oil engine sets; they will boycott synthetic fibres and use only cotton textiles. Joshi also demanded that the Agricultural Price Commission be replaced by an Agricultural Cost Commission as the former has failed to give farmers remunerative prices for their goods.

Whether the committee finally succeeds in translating its plans into action or not, one thing is certain—the five-year-old Sanghatana can no longer be taken lightly. Even as the three-day conference wound to a close, tape-recorded speeches, booklets and badges were quickly packed off to villages to ensure that Joshi's message reached the remotest corners of Maharashtra.

Joshi is considering making the organisation cadre-based and enlisting 100 full-time workers. District-level action committees have been formed and action squads enlisted to send agitators wherever needed. A gherao is planned at the governor's residence in Chandigarh; a prachar yatra is slated for Gujarat. Even if grain doesn't get to the mandis, farmers are making sure there is plenty of food for thought.—KIRAN THAKUR

KARNATAKA

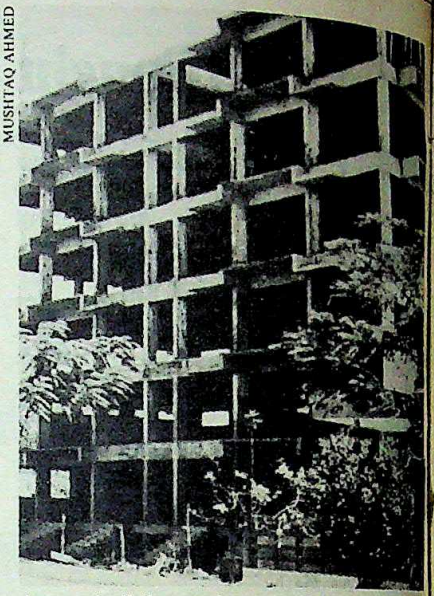
Bangalore Bust



IF CITIES had voices, Bangalore would be screaming by now. Over the past decade, an unsightly rash of high-rise buildings has spoilt the city's skyline. But more upsetting for Bangaloreans is a growing fear that some of these have been built with more emphasis on speed and economy than safety and durability.

Though much damage has already been done by way of faulty construction, there seems hope for a more controlled "boom" in the near future. The report of an expert committee on the safety or otherwise of buildings now being constructed is expected later this month. Future construction too is to be regulated by stringent new bye-laws which are to take effect on April 26 this year.

The new laws will limit all new buildings to five storeys except on seven specified streets. Builders will have to obtain nine no-objection certificates from various organisations such as the fire department, the electricity board and the water supply and sewerage board. They must also leave 15 ft of space in front of buildings to facilitate fire fighting and provide fire escapes.



MUSHTAQ AHMED

A new building to be demolished and (right) debris of the Gangaram building: safety first

The laws also specify minimum qualifications for designers and supervisors of high-rise construction. An aspect of building safety hitherto ignored is the testing of soil before construction. Under the new laws, results of soil tests will have to be submitted along with the application for sanction of the plan.

Though these bye-laws are certainly encouraging, their efficacy will depend on their strict enforcement. In the past, the Bangalore City Corporation has followed the rule more in the breach than otherwise. The corporation admitted in the Supreme Court last September that it had sanctioned 248 buildings higher than the five floors permitted under the zoning regulations.

In all, 600 licences have been given since 1970, 321 of these since 1979. A number of these were given to builders and settlers from outside Bangalore. Many Bangaloreans feel that a major reason for the low quality of construction work is that these outsiders love money more than the city.

In the past, both the state Government and the city corporation have been happy to watch the frenetic pace of construction passively. It was only in September last, after the Gangaram building collapsed, crushing 12 persons, that the corporation woke up.

It appointed a three-member expert committee to examine the 144 buildings then being constructed. Since September, the committee has thoroughly examined 91 of these and discovered 11 of them seriously defective, with cracks in the beams, columns

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and roof slabs. In some of them, they found that vital concrete pillars had not set enough and contained "honeycombs".

On February 20, the corporation ordered the demolition of one such building located in the plush Raj Mahal Vilas Extension. Major repairs are to be undertaken on the other 10 buildings, but it would be less costly to demolish and rebuild those whose crucial load bearing pillars contain badly compacted concrete.

In one of the buildings, the experts decided, after testing the soil bearing capacity (SBC) that a column running up eight floors needed to be urgently shored up if the building was to be prevented from sinking. The builders, who immediately undertook repairs, now expect the building to be ready in six months. In another case, a building designed to be four storeys high was limited to two storeys after the SBC tests.

After their comprehensive tests, the experts found 75 of the 91 buildings in good or at least passable shape. In 32 of these, though, they recommended specific repairs.

Meanwhile, in the public mind, a wave of uncertainty and fear has grown in the wake of the Gangaram building collapse. The value of floor space in high-rise buildings has declined steadily. From as much as Rs 400-Rs 500 per sq ft in 1981-82 in prime areas like Cunningham Road, Queen's Road and Infantry Road, prices have slumped to Rs 300-Rs 350 and even, in one case, to Rs 200.

The reluctance of the Government and the corporation to reveal the preliminary reports of the expert committee has only heightened the fear in most people's minds that high-rise buildings spell danger. Compounding this is the corporation's decision to examine only buildings under construction while ignoring those already occupied —ironically, in order to prevent panic.

—K. BHANUMATHI



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ANDHRA PRADESH

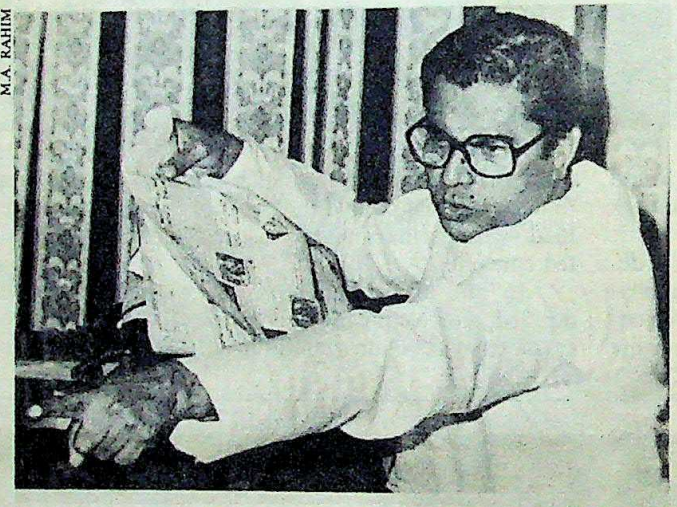
Taking the Bait

WHEN Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao sacked his Minister of State for Labour and Employment M. Ramachandra Rao last fortnight, he was making history of sorts in his inimitable theatrical style. In an unprecedented move, the film star turned chief minister laid a trap to verify whether his minister was actually taking bribes as had been alleged. The dismissal came soon after the bait proved successful. Unmindful of the storm the sensational incident was raising, the chief minister dramatically told the state Assembly: "This is only the beginning... the people of the state have reposed their trust in me, and it is my firm determination to discharge my duties of *dharma* and *satya*."

When the trap shut on him, a stunned Ramachandra Rao rushed to the chief minister's house but could not meet him till the next day. Rama Rao reportedly told him that the ploy had been necessary because of the serious charges of corruption against him. The chief minister in fact did not want to make it public until after the current budget session in the legislature. But the very next day, *Andhra Bhoomi*, the enterprising Telugu daily and its English sister publication *The Deccan Chronicle* carried reports on the raid. Ramachandra Rao immediately called a press conference and told reporters that he had never taken the money, and that the chief minister had deliberately rigged it to trap him. He said angrily: "If the chief minister was unhappy with me because of the allegations, he could have taken any action against me, including dismissal. But why this recourse to a trap to paint me as a corrupt man?"

Rama Rao, who was away in Madras to attend matinee idol A. Nageswara Rao's son's wedding, flew back to Hyderabad cutting short his visit. The same evening, Governor Ram Lal issued a terse statement that on the advice of the chief minister he was "pleased to remove" Ramachandra Rao from the council of ministers with immediate effect. Nonplussed, supporters of the dismissed minister from his constituency in Khairatabad (Hyderabad) called it a "deep-rooted conspiracy". President of the local unit, P.V. Pandu, said: "The whole thing is incredible, unbelievable and fabricated." Few in the party are willing to support Ramachandra Rao, though. P. Upendra, Telugu Desam general secretary, said confidently: "This is a warning against all partymen who are so inclined that the chief minister is not afraid of taking action against them."

A former building contractor, Ramachandra Rao, 50, was just a sarpanch at Kukatpalli village, 10 km from Hyderabad, before he joined the Telugu Desam. As party candidate from Khairatabad, he defeated the Congress(I) candidate P. Janardana Reddy, a former minister, by over 13,000 votes. Even as a sarpanch, he faced charges of corruption but the chief minister gave him a minister's post anyway because he belonged to the minority Velama community. A Telugu Desam spokesman dismisses him with "his performance was so-so. He was on the axing list, and the trap only hastened the process."


M.A. RAHIM


M.A. RAHIM

Ramachandra Rao (top) and NTR: trapping game

Partymen say that even during his ministership, Ramachandra Rao had many charges of corruption levelled at him. The chief minister's suspicions were fuelled when the minister conducted his only son's wedding in an extravagant fashion. In fact, several industrialists had complained to Rama Rao that the minister had been "collecting" money from them to meet expenses. To investigate these charges, Rama Rao asked one industrialist, whose name has not yet been disclosed, to offer Ramachandra Rao the bait. The industrialist was to offer the minister Rs 10,000 to help settle an industrial dispute in his oil factory in Kakinada.

Accordingly, the industrialist contacted the minister's personal secretary, Gaffar, on February 15 for an appointment. A sum of Rs 1,000 changed hands before the appointment was fixed for the next day—meanwhile, the industrialist had taped his conversation with the secretary. The next day at 8.10 a.m. the industrialist entered the orange-carpeted chambers of the minister's palatial residence at Begumpet. He explained that he had sacked seven employees from his company, and asked the minister for support in this. An envelope containing Rs 10,000 was discreetly handed across. The entire conversation took just two minutes on the industrialist's tape. As soon as he left, V. Appa Rao, deputy director-general of police, entered the chambers and charged the minister with accepting a bribe.

But in setting such a trap, Rama Rao might have been asking for legal trouble. The state's Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) has been the body responsible for investigation against corrupt public servants, and the dharma maha matra is supposed to advise the Government on such matters. In addition, the lok ayukta set up last November (INDIA TODAY, December 15) has the power to investigate charges of corruption against a wide range of officials including members of the state legislature. Especially, with the recent Supreme Court ruling that a member of the state legislature is not a public servant, not even the ACB is competent to investigate charges against members of the state legislature, giving the lok ayukta the sole prerogative to do so.

In the case of Ramachandra Rao, however, the chief minister did not consult the lok ayukta at all. The point of contention is likely to be whether the chief minister can thus in effect take the law into his own hands. But Rama Rao is not worried. He says: "Whether I was right in doing this should be left to the intellectuals and legal experts. The programmes and ideologies of political par-

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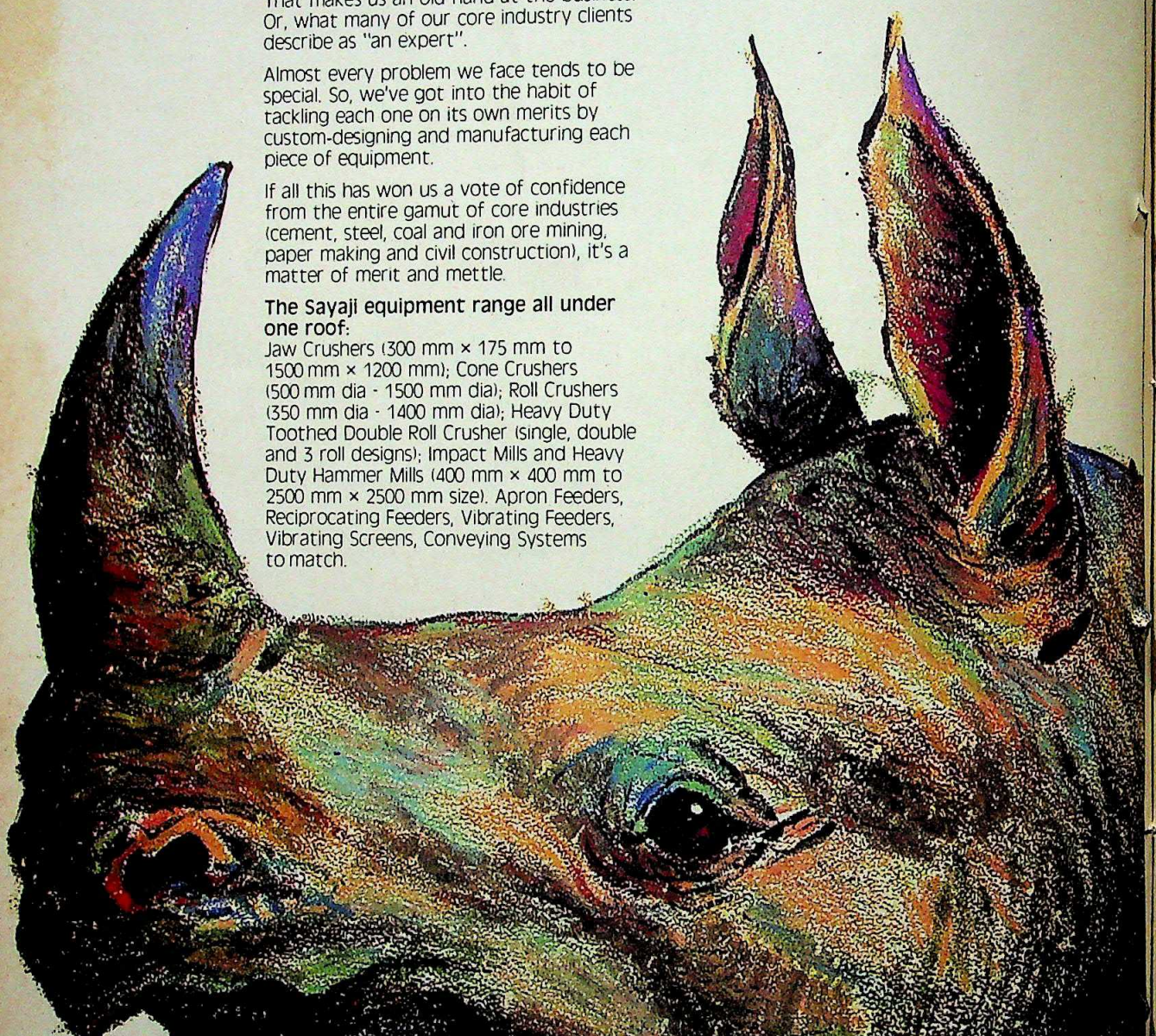
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ties may be different, but we should all be one in the fight against corruption. The people have great expectations from us and we have to fulfil them."

The trapping of Ramachandra Rao proved more controversial particularly because the budget session was still on in the legislature. Congress(I) members predictably jumped at the chance to take a few swipes at the chief minister, although ironically enough they themselves had hurled charges of corruption against the discredited minister. Criticising the trap the Congress(I) leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, A. Madan Mohan said: "The chief minister has resorted to cheap filmy gimmicks to enhance his personal glory which is fast diminishing." His colleagues were quick to point out that similar charges had been made against other ministers and Rama Rao himself as well:

▶ K. Keshav Rao, Congress(I) MLC claims that Rama Rao has grabbed land in Musheerabad and Nacharam under the pretext of expanding Ramakrishna Studio. He also accuses the chief minister of showing favouritism to his son-in-law Chandrababu Naidu by making electricity available to his factory although it has not yet been sanctioned power.

▶ Transport Minister S. Satyanarayana and Health Minister Ramamuni Reddy have been charged by APCC(I) President Y.S. Rajashekhar Reddy with accepting Rs 2.2 lakh from private bus owners in Cuddapah district. In turn, the bus owners are alleged to have been promised that bus routes in the district would not be nationalised for at least the next six months.

▶ Y. Ramakrishnudu, minister of state for law and municipality has been charged with sanctioning an unauthorised construction for twin theatres in Rajahmundry and a multi-storeyed complex in Kakinada.

The Congress(I)'s efforts to run down the Telugu Desam have not made much headway, however, because of the factionalism within the party. Hard evidence of this came last fortnight when M. Channa Reddy, former Congress(I) chief minister of the state broke away formally to launch a new party, called the National Democratic Party. Few Congress(I) heavy-weights were weaned to the new party, though: legislators Uma Venkatram Reddy and K. Narasimha Reddy, and MP Rode Mistry were the only big names present at the party meeting at Vijayawada. But it has come as a bad blow to the Congress(I), working to Rama Rao's advantage. An apparently stoic Rajashekhar Reddy said: "Good riddance. He is the one who has institutionalised corruption and is responsible for the fall of the Congress(I) in the state."

Meanwhile, other parties like the BJP, the CPI(M) and the CPI have supported Rama Rao's action against his erring minister. Raghava Reddy of the CPI(M) said: "No one should bother about the manner or method employed by the chief minister to expose corruption. The end result is important."

Ramoji Rao, editor of *Eenadu*, the state's *Deccan Chronicle*, said sharply: "By laying the trap, the chief minister has only strengthened the suspicion that what he does, he does dramatically with a view to gaining popularity...while admiring the chief minister's concern about ridding the administration of corruption and inefficiency, one is unable to agree with him on the methods—which look like movie tricks." Movie tricks or not, this latest evidence of N.T. Rama Rao's unorthodox style of functioning only indicates that Andhra Pradesh will continue to be a state of surprises.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA in Hyderabad

DELHI

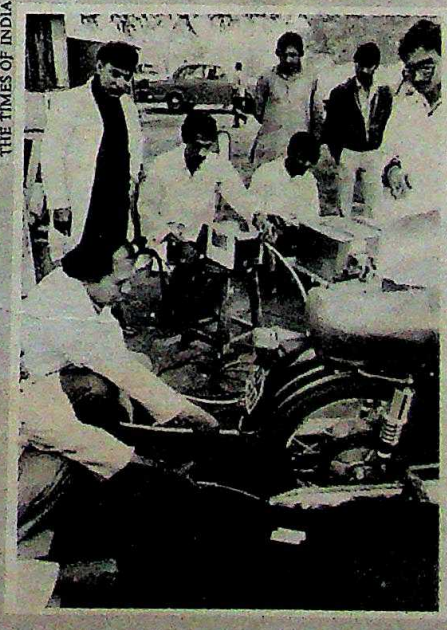
Gasping for Air

DELHI'S air today is 75 per cent more polluted than it was a decade ago. In 1973, power plants, industries, automobiles and other polluters were belching out some 800 tonnes of pollutants into the atmosphere daily. Today that figure has risen to 1,400 tonnes, and of increasing concern to the city's residents is the large fraction of this amount contributed by automobiles. Already some of the major monuments of the city—the Diwan-e-Aam and the Diwan-e-Khas in the Red Fort and the Jama Masjid—are showing the ugly effects of sulphur emissions from vehicles.

These vehicles emit about 466 tonnes of pollutants daily, according to a study by the School of Environmental Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). This amounts to 34 per cent of the pollutants in the capital's environment, the highest of any city in India. The figures for Calcutta and Bombay are 20 and 23 per cent respectively.

According to Dr J.M. Dave, dean of the School of Environmental Studies, on the basis of kilometres travelled, pollution by automobiles in the capital is among the highest in the world. Says he: "Delhi has one vehicle per 10 persons. Thanks to the highest per capita income, it has one car, jeep or station wagon per 50 persons, against the national average of one per 800, and the highest travel of 2.6 vehicle kilo miles per day per person." But, he adds: "Size to size, Indian vehicles emit seven times more pollutants than Japanese vehicles and five-and-a-half times more than American vehicles." The vehicles on the city's roads are multiplying, and of them, nearly 67 per cent are two and three-wheeled vehicles.

These two- and three-wheelers, according to Dave and Nilay Chaudhry, chairman of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), are responsible for a much larger share of pollution in proportion to fuel consumed. "Most of these vehicles," points out Dave, "are fitted with spark ignition engines and work on a two-stroke cycle which needs oil for lubrication. Oil is an inherent pollutant." He adds that "two- and three-wheelers contribute two-and-a-half times and 10 times more hydrocarbons than cars and diesel driven vehicles respectively, per unit of fuel consumption".



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Pollution experts check vehicles

The CPCB places the level of hydrocarbons released by two- and three-wheelers at 83 per cent of total vehicular emissions. It is also estimated that 60 per cent of the total carbon monoxide released in Delhi can be traced back to these vehicles. Oxides of nitrogen (released more by heavy vehicles) are known to produce photochemical smog; carbon monoxide neutralises haemoglobin in the blood, resulting in reduced respiratory capacity. The study also says 44 kg of head, with known poisonous effects, is released into the atmosphere daily.

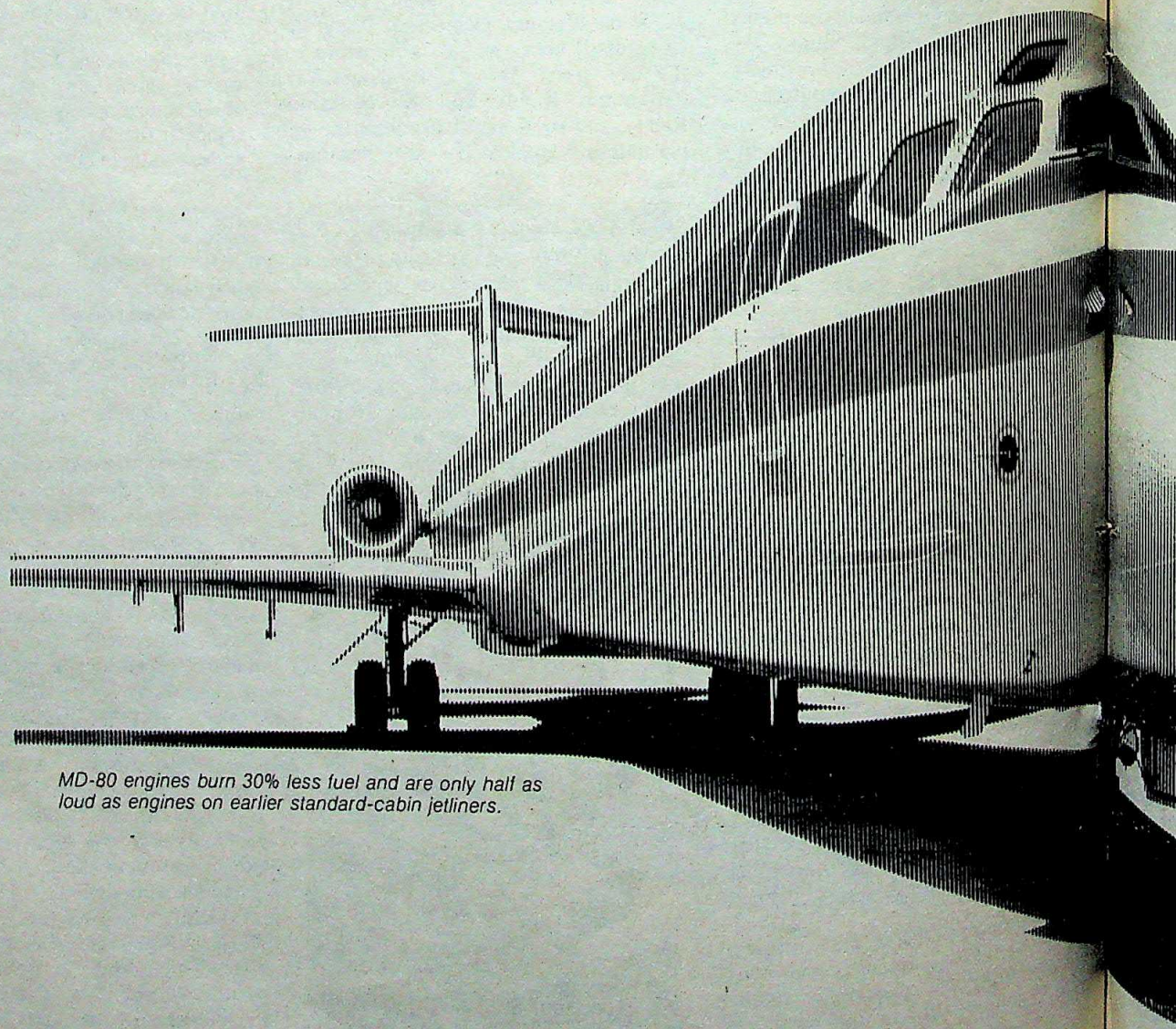
Delhi's Lt-Governor Jagmohan, who has taken a keen interest in the city's environment, feels "it is not only the quantity of pollution released that matters, but where it is released. Delhi's green pockets are its lungs, and do absorb a good deal of the emissions". But the lungs are going to be gasping for air fairly soon.

—PRABHA DUTT

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Aboard the MD-80
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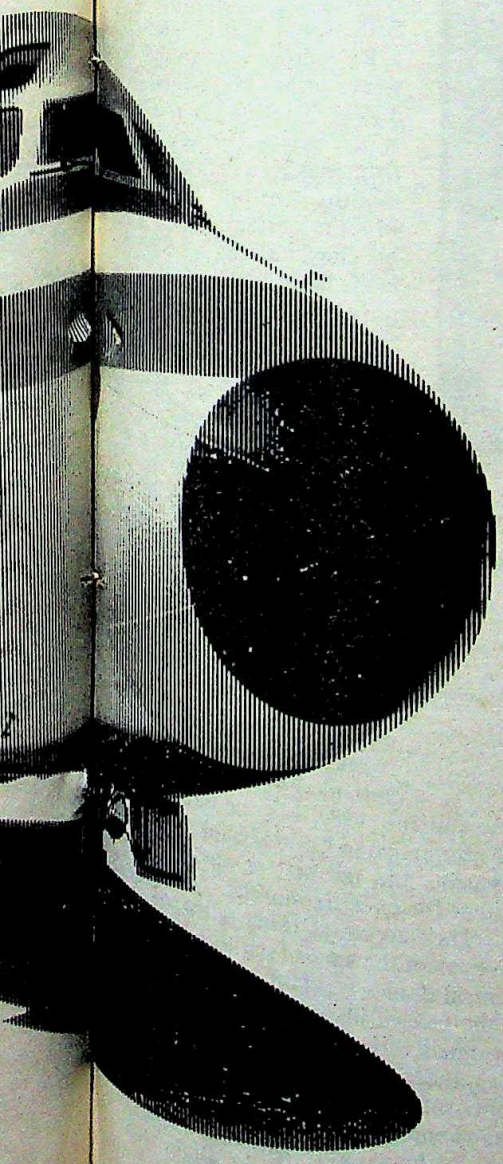


MD-80 engines burn 30% less fuel and are only half as loud as engines on earlier standard-cabin jetliners.

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-80
l beathe saves fuel.



The McDonnell Douglas MD-80 is designed to squeeze every bit of energy from every drop of fuel. Even the MD-80 cabin ventilation system saves fuel by reducing the use of engine power to supply clean, fresh cabin air.

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MD-80 saves Rs.1.5 crores per year.

The MD-80 flies more passengers farther on 30% less fuel than the airplanes it replaces. And, because the MD-80 needs a flight crew of only two, personnel costs are low. Total MD-80 savings can be as much as Rs.1.5 crores for each aircraft each year, when compared with others of similar passenger capacity.

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New digital flight guidance and control system has a performance-monitoring capability which helps cut maintenance costs.

MCDONNELL DOUGLAS

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BANKING

The Sethia Saga

IT HAS all the makings of a banker's nightmare: large unsecured loans going sour, borrowers unable to pay and an unusually irate Reserve Bank of India (RBI) crying for blood. The nightmare was close to reality in the corridors of the Bombay-based Central Bank of India, third largest nationalised bank (deposits Rs 3,860 crore), last fortnight as it sought to pick up the pieces of what threatens to be a major financial misadventure.

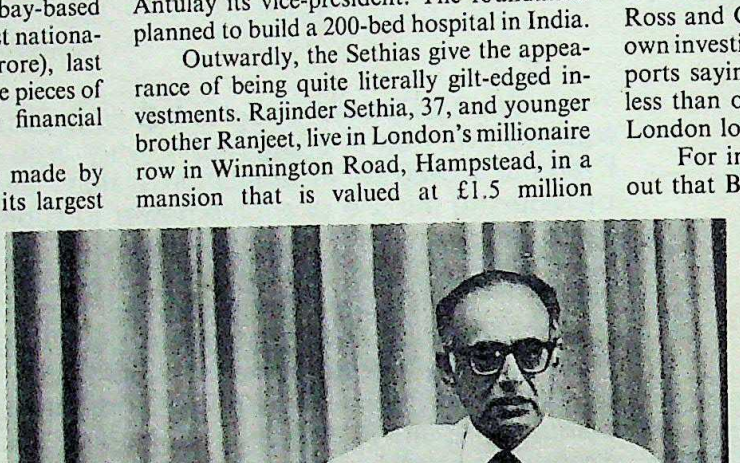
The loans in question were made by Central Bank's London branch, its largest overseas, which between 1980 and 1983 advanced £34.5 million (Rs 51.7 crore) to the Esal Group of Industries (turnover over £100 m) owned by the UK-based businessman Rajinder Sethia, his brother Ranjeet Sethia and two associates. So far so good. But numerous audit reports had repeatedly pointed out irregularities in these loans, that they were in contravention of certain banking regulations, that they were largely unsecured, that, in fact, they should not have been made at all.

Last month, noting with anger that these reports had been ignored and that two were no signs of repayment even though the loans fell due starting June 1983, the RBI squarely blamed Central Bank for what had happened. Almost in panic, top Central Bank officials began frenetic efforts to cut their losses. The two Sethias were summoned to Bombay but they pleaded for more advances to tide them over their current difficulties before they could start making repayments. The bank then suspended N.M. Valecha, its chief manager in London, and launched criminal proceedings against the officials who had sanctioned the loans. It also tried to persuade the Union Bank of India (UBI) and the Punjab National Bank (PNB) to join in an ambitious Rs 15 crore rehabilitation effort to bail out the Esal group —but the move was shot down by the RBI.

Though the three Sethia brothers, settled in London, have business interests all over the world, their dealings with India are minimal. The Esal group has received something like Rs 100 crore from three Indian banks: Central Bank, PNB and UBI. The fourth brother, Nirmal Sethia—who runs his own independent business—has a slightly more controversial link with India. In 1980, he floated the Sethia Foundation and made former Maharashtra chief minister Abdul Rahman Antulay its vice-president. The foundation planned to build a 200-bed hospital in India.

Outwardly, the Sethias give the appearance of being quite literally gilt-edged investments. Rajinder Sethia, 37, and younger brother Ranjeet, live in London's millionaire row in Winnington Road, Hampstead, in a mansion that is valued at £1.5 million (Rs 2.2 crore). They started international commodity trading in 1970 when Rajinder was in his early 20s, branching out from their father's jute business in Calcutta. In 1975, they ran into financial difficulties due to some disastrous investments but soon recovered thanks to their business dealings in Nigeria, Zambia and the Sudan.

Rajinder sports a lavish lifestyle which includes a private Boeing 707, two Rolls-Royces with personalised number plates and a Mercedes 500 limousine. They have real estate investments in America and in London at least, their image is one of high flying and high-living young tycoons.



"None of our international operations are dubious. Banking is a sensitive area. It can be carried out in the glare of publicity to an extent, after that it becomes counter-productive."

—B.V. SONALKER
Chairman, Central Bank

Understandably, the bank itself was doing its best to keep the whole affair under wraps. Its soft-spoken Chairman, B.V. Sonalker, declined to discuss the affair. "We should not probe banking deals like we do in cases of licences and other commercial deals. In our case it is the institutional prestige which is at stake and not that of any individual," he said. While that may be true, there was no dearth of probes under way or in the files into the potential fiasco in London. Central Bank's London auditors, Touche Ross and Co, the RBI and finally the bank's own investigators, filed a steady stream of reports saying that the advances to Esal, no less than one-third of Central Bank's total London loans, were highly irregular.

For instance, the RBI's reports pointed out that B.R. Patankar, who retired as the branch's deputy general manager on May 31, 1983, is currently living in a house owned by the Sethias, and that he sanctioned a Rs 8 crore loan to them six weeks prior to his retirement—a clear violation of a regulation which bars a retiring employee from making a loan less than six months before retirement. More important, Patankar and his chief Valecha were making loans far in excess of their sanctioned limit of £50,000 (Rs 7.5 lakh) without the proper clearance of the board in Bombay.

In some cases, however, the officers in London sought and obtained Sonalker's permission even though the Esal group was defaulting in payments. The RBI asked Sonalkar to justify a grant of a credit limit of US$15 million (Rs 15 crore) in favour of Esal Commodities. Under this facility, sanctioned by the chairman, on March 31, 1982, the Bank of Sudan was given guarantees by Central Bank. They were to have been repaid altogether Rs 15 crore in June and July 1983. But the Bank of Sudan has not replied to Central Bank's request for payment, and the matter was not pursued further for over six months.

The surprising thing is that it should have taken the RBI so long to react and that Central Bank's head office failed to act at all in the face of internal audit reports until it was goaded by the RBI. As far back as 1980, when the loans began, Touche Ross pointed out in their report for the year that the bank was running serious risks because less than half its loans were unsecured. The audit report said: "Of the total group loans of £2.8 million (Rs 4.2 crore) only £1 million

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appears to have legally enforceable security. In addition, no head office approval for these loans appears yet to have been received."

Touche Ross' other reports in subsequent years were no less telling. Its 1980 report never reached Central Bank directors but its reports for the fiscal years ending December 1981 and December 1982 reiterated that loans to the Esal group were not fully protected. Making no bones about the fact that they considered advances made by the bank's London officials to the group to be unauthorised, an audit report dated April 26, 1983, for the year ended December 1982 estimated that "the total outstanding advan-ces to the Esal group stood at £3,45,43,756 and total security was valued at £1,63,13,539."

If the reports reached responsible levels at Central Bank's head office, they appear to have evoked little reaction. But the RBI sat up and certainly took notice. In a letter written to Central Bank in August 1983, the RBI said: "It will be observed that between 1981 and 1982, the total accommodation to the Esal group increased from £9.5 million to £34.54 million. Further between 31st December 1982 and 31st May 1983"—when Patankar retired—"the total securities registered a marked decline from £16.31 million to £6.03 million."

The RBI did not leave it at that. When Central Bank ignored its initial queries, the RBI wrote a series of strongly worded letters between November 1983 and February 1984. On December 2, 1983, Deputy Governor A. Ghosh wrote to Sonalker listing the various irregularities in the Esal account. Said Ghosh: "We shall be glad if you will please let us have your comments on the various aspects mentioned above and in particular the present position of dues from this group, the security available and the action taken to recover the amount as well as to secure the advances. The circumstances in which such unauthorised accommodation was granted by your London office, the action taken or proposed against the concerned officials and the steps to be taken or proposed against the concerned officials and the steps to be taken to prevent recurrence may also be advised to us."

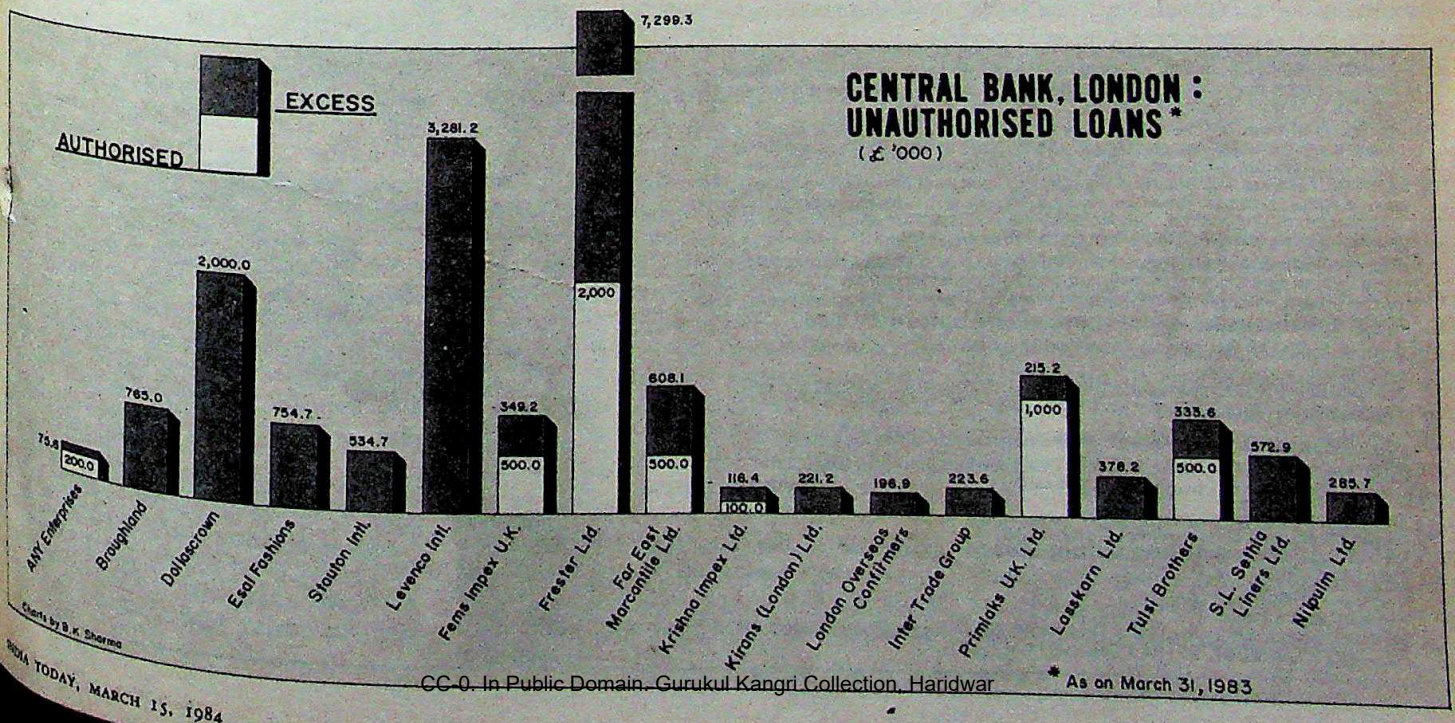
The RBI had to follow up yet again, and on December 7, 1983, RBI's Additional Chief Officer M.L. Inasu pointed out that Central Bank's London branch was holding substantial quantities of overdue export bills purchased in 1981 and 1982, that the branch had been "entertaining unauthorised business in a substantial manner" and that the deputy general manager in London had exceeded his powers in extending various facilities to the Esal group.

The RBI was persistent because its ovn official investigating team had visited London in January 1983 and it also had internal reports from a Central Bank investigation in June 1983. Central Bank had sent Assistant General Manager R.R. Kulkarni and Senior Internal Auditor R.K. Nagpaul to look at the London operation after the economic crisis in Nigeria where some one-third of the Esal group's business was concentrated. By this time, Patankar had retired and Nigerian banks were raising difficulties in their dealings with the London branch.

The two-member Central Bank team stayed three months and uncovered an astonishing web of irregularities. Among them, they found that the top officials of the branch had relied on their personal assessments of the financial standing of borrowers and personal guarantees of directors rather than on prescribed statements of assets and liabilities supported by tax returns and proper loan applications. They confirmed audit reports that credit facilities were disproportionate to the known resources of the borrowers. In the few cases where head office permission had been given, full details had not been sent to Bombay. And, companies registered outside Britain such as Levenco International were given credit facilities in violation of RBI guidelines.

The team also indicted the London branch for allowing excess lending without getting written approval from the bank's headquarters and said that accounts were being inflated to cover overdrafts and keep the head office in the dark about the actual amount of unsecured loans. The team also noticed instances where the same property had been mortgaged twice to justify certain advances. In one case, a property worth £2 million (Rs 3 crore) was mortaged for a loan of £5 million (Rs 7.5 crore) to purchase bills and a letter of credit. But the same property had been shown as security against overdrafts.

The team uncovered numerous other instances where the bank had paid out money to Esal concerns by discounting their bills but not recovering them from the banks on which they were drawn. The bank, for example, should have collected £2.8 million (Rs 4.2 crore) on a transaction between Esal Commodities and Nimpex Nigeria on a bill of lading in January 1983. The bill was instead sent to Lagos and had not been returned by October 1983 when the team was making its investigations. The team concluded that the bills may have been mis-



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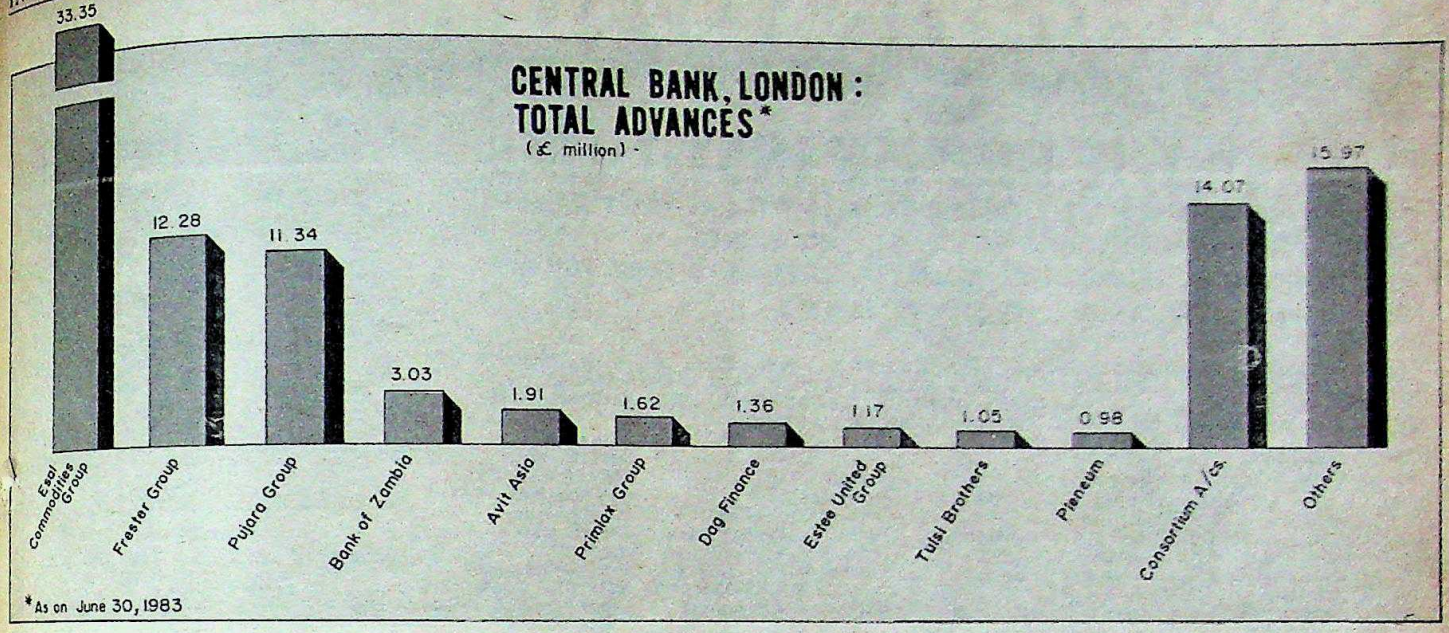
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placed or lost, causing a loss to the bank.

Similarly, in another case the London branch discounted bills worth £4.37 million (Rs 6.5 crore) drawn by Levenco International, an Esal concern, on an associate, Esal Commodities (USA) for sugar sold to Nigeria. The bill was sent to the issuing bank, but it hadn't been recovered by October. Interestingly, in this case the issuing bank happended to be the State Bank of India in New York and it warned Central Bank that Esal Commodities (USA) was not coming forward to retire the bills.

The London branch has also been grilled for discounting the same shipping documents twice and transferring the money to the accounts of various Sethia concerns. On May 7, 1982, Esal Commodities submitted documents under letter of credit dated March 9, 1982, for US $1.15 million for exporting sugar to Nigeria under shipping papers dated April 30, 1982 issued by Global Bridge Ltd. These documents were drawn on Nimpex Nigeria and were encashed by Central Bank on July 2, 1982.

The money was, however, credited not in the account of Esal Commodities but in the account of S.L. Sethia Liners Ltd owned by Ranjeet Sethia. Esal Commodities submitted the same documents issued by Global again on May 11, 1982. The bank released Rs 5 crore to the Sethias but Central Bank approached the Nigerian bank on December 6, 1982, for money it was informed that the letter of credit opened by Nimpex had expired, and money would be released only after collection.

The Sethias are by no means the only clients to have gained from the Central Bank. Two other London-based groups—the Frester group owned by G.P and P.G. Lakhiani and the Pujara group owned by Mahendra Pujara have also benefited substantially. According to audit reports Frester owes the bank £12.28 million (Rs 18.4 crore) and the Pujaras owe over £11 million (Rs 16.5 crore). In both instances, the auditors say a lot of the money was lent without taking adequate securities. In fact one foreign bank recently sued the Frester group for the recovery of the loans and Lakhiani came to India to organise funds to repay his debts in London.

In another major development, the Esal group ran into trouble with the Allied Arab Bank. Two directors of Esal Commodities were arrested last month when Allied Arab complained that the concern had obtained £1.6 million (Rs 2.4 crore) by presenting duplicate bills of lading. In legal proceedings last fortnight, the court ordered that no creditor would be able to release or dispose of any property or deposits belonging to the Esal group without prior approval of Allied Arab.

While the injunction was received last fortnight, notice had been served last October, forcing Central Bank to take anticipatory action. At a meeting held in November 1983, a three-member committee comprising Y.P. Trivedi, Dipankar Chatterji and B.L. Passi—all non-official members of the board—was appointed to investigate the matter and monitor the recovery of the loans. While Sonalker was on leave, J.V. Shetty, a deputy general manager, was sent to London to manage rescue operations. Since a lot of money had been lent during Sonalker's tenure, a campaign was launched by some members to get Sonalker sacked after his three-year term was due to expire in December 1983.

However, Sonalker survived, first getting a one-month extension and then a three-year permanent tenure. In fact his case was supported strongly by Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee and RBI Governor Manmohan Singh. Mukherjee even ignored intelligence reports about Sonalker's role in granting loans to London-based businessmen.

Soon after he was reapointed, Sonalker summoned the meeting with the PNB and UBI to work out the rescue programme. Since all of them are in the same predicament of wanting to collect money from the Sethias, they were only too glad to lend their support to his moves. But when the RBI stood firm a fresh attempt was made by the lenders who include several foreign banks who met in Copenhagen last month to try and cobble together some scheme that would bail out the Sethias.

The most extravagant suggestion was that Esal should be given an additional Rs 15 crore to pay off their foreign debts. In addition it was suggested that a two-year moratorium should be imposed on debt recovery and withdrawal of all legal proceedings. But when PNB Chairman S.L. Baluja moved his board to give an additional Rs 5 crore to the Sethias he was instead directed to take steps for the recovery of over Rs 25 crore owed by the Sethias.

Despite such set-backs, Sonalker is still confident about the foreign advances. He refuses to comment on any individual account and says staunchly: "None of our international operations are dubious. Banking is a sensitive area. It can be carried out in the glare of publicity to an extent, after that it becomes counter-productive. We are hopeful that everything will become normal in London within a few weeks." But even if the bank gets back its money it will leave many questions unanswered about why its London branch was always so willing to help the house of Sethia prosper.

—PRABHU CHAWLA in Bombay

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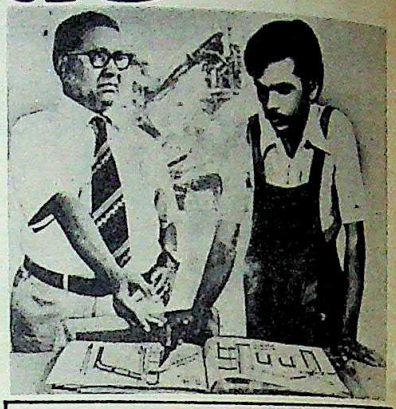
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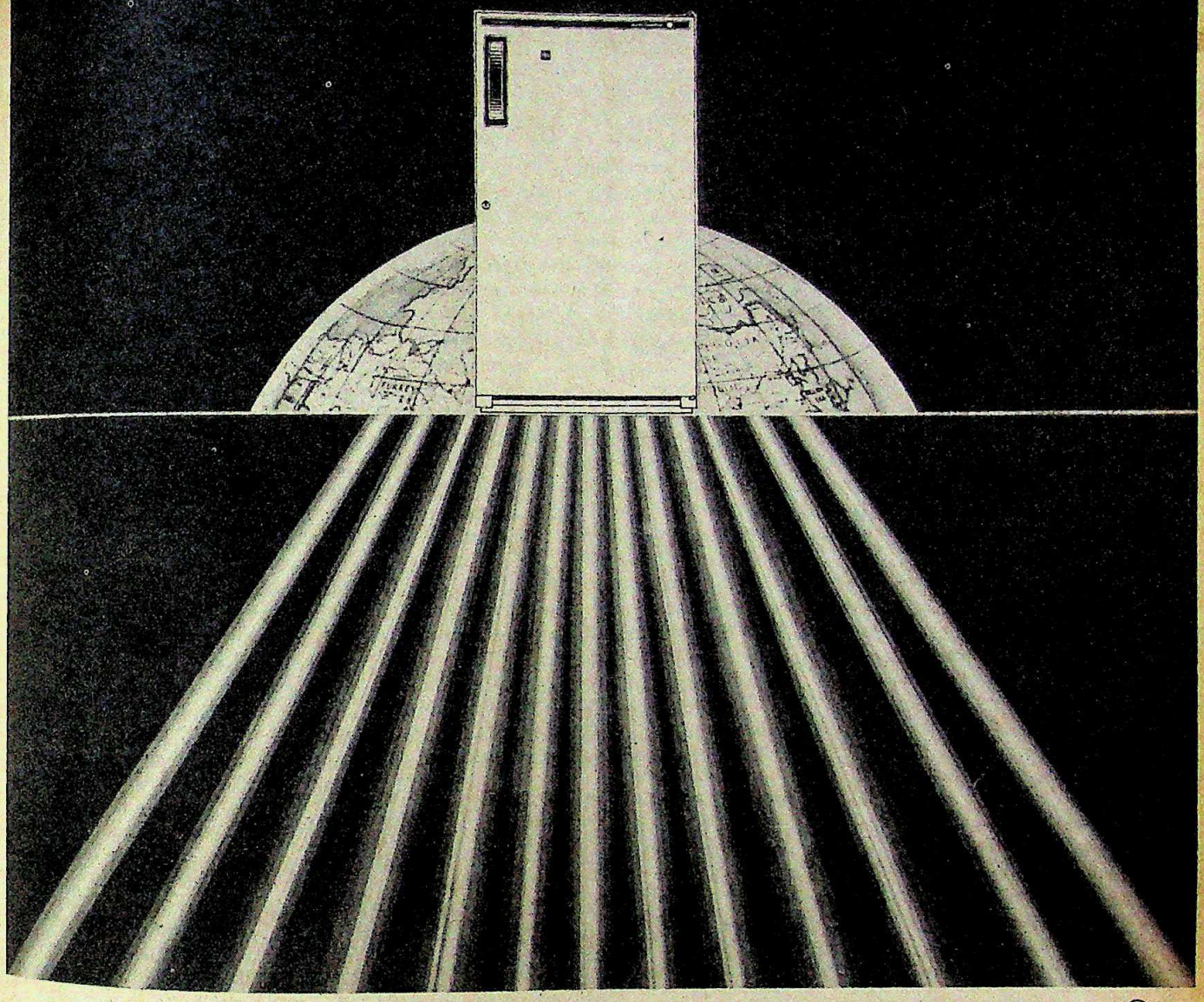
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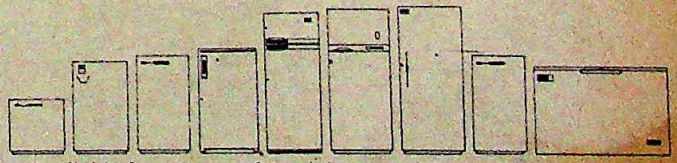
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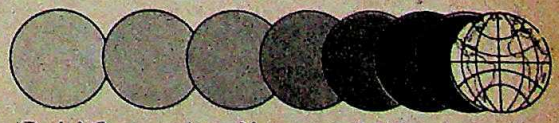


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MAHARASHTRA

Deadly Retaliation

THE MURDER last fortnight in Ulhasnagar was brutal, cold-blooded and in broad daylight. *Blitz* weekly subeditor A.N. Narayan, along with neighbour Ravi Sharma, was walking to the Vithalwadi station just two furlongs from his house when he was accosted by two men. Sharma, slapped on the back, was asked to run for his life. When he returned a short while later, he found Narayan in a pool of blood with 25 stab wounds.

The murder seemed a clear case of retaliation for Narayan's writings in an Ulhasnagar eveninger *Sandhesh* and *Blitz* exposing gangsters operating in the locality. Ulhasnagar, a small township which is basically an extended suburb of Bombay, has become a major haunt for well-established smugglers and gangsters having links with both politicians and the police.

A week after the incident two persons were arrested for the murder and another two detained under NSA. D. Ramachandran, Commissioner of police, Thane, who directly handled the investigations after charges that the local inspector was shielding the culprits, claimed that a conspiracy had been hatched to do away with Narayan on February 11 in the house of a man called Maruti Jadhav.

The *Blitz* issue of January 14 had exposed a racket of Ulhasnagar gangsters enjoying political protection and had published the letter of a Congress(I) municipal councillor to the police testifying to Jadhav's bona fides and the fact that he was an active Congress(I) worker of Ulhasnagar.

Jadhav has a police record. He was earlier detained under NSA and is an accused in several cases including a murder case in Ambernath. He and an accomplice Sanjay Choudhary have been arrested in Ahmednagar.

Narayan had for some time been aware that his life was under threat because of his writings. In September last year he narrowly escaped a major accident after a truck rammed into his car when he was returning from a wedding. Last month he received anonymous phone calls threatening him, as well as a warning of dire consequences from the lawyer of one of the mobsters.

Curiously, a rival Hindi evening paper *Ulhas Vikas Dainik* had also been keen to whip up sentiment against Narayan, and in January carried a headline: "Sahakar *Sandesh* murdabad and A.V. Narayan murdabad." The inflammatory headline was in the context of a local meeting of citizens on problems of the area. The newspaper had twisted news of the meeting to imply that Narayan was encouraging differences between Sindhis and non-Sindhis.

Blitz Editor Rusi Karanjia vowed that his weekly would not rest till all the culprits were booked, not just the hired killers. He charged that the plot to kill Narayan had been hatched in jail by one of the city's leading gangsters who enjoyed political patronage. The mafia's grip in Ulhasnagar was proved when three days after Narayan's death a four-year-old child was thrown into a well by kidnappers after her father failed to pay a ransom of Rs 5,000. A day later Srichand Ahuja, editor of *Sindhi Jagatwasi*, was attacked by an unknown man with a stick. The stick missed Ahuja but shattered a glass table.

The public outcry against Narayan's killing came immediately. N. Murli, president of the IENS, observed that the incident reflected the growing trend of assualts on the freedom of the press and democracy itself. Said Prakash Joshi, general secretary of the Bombay Union of Journlists: "The danger to journilists who try to get away from the routine and investigate malpractices is very real. Police protection is not always forthcoming. Maharashtra leads all states in the number of attacks on journalists."

In August last year Arvind Karadkar, the Panchgani correspondent for the Marathi daily *Tarun Bharat* was knifed to death by three killers. Karadkar had incurred the wrath of a gang of bootleggers whose activities he had exposed, forcing the police to take action. Karadkar was lured to his death with the promise of a tip-off. He was killed on a lonely ghat beyond Wai and his body dumped in a drain near Bavdhan.

His corpse might never have been found if the taxi-driver hired by the killers had not informed his master of the murder. Three assailants have been arrested in the Karadkar murder. In the same month in Nagpur Subhash Laddard, a correspondent of the *Nagpur Patrika* stationed at Katol, was stabbed seven times and seriously injured while walking on the street in the day-time.

Journalists in the city recall at least three unsolved murders of journalists in Bombay during the last decade. M.P. Iyer, close to a particular leader, was done to death in a staged accident in 1974. Urdu journalist Iqbal Natique was murdered during the Emergency and Sardar Irfan Khan, a contributor to *Inquilab* and a known figure in the Urdu Academy, was killed in 1982.

Apart from the two Ulhasnagar attacks last fortnight there was yet another threat to press freedom with Shiv Sena activists taking objection to an article on its leader Bal Thackeray in *The Week* calling him a "paper tiger". Several hundred copies of the magazine were destroyed and hawkers asked not to display copies. *The Week*'s proprietors also asked for police protection for their Bombay Correspondent Ashok Rao Kavi. Elsewhere too there were signs that attacks on media personnel were increasing alarmingly. *Indian Express* Correspondent Sanjeev Gaur was attacked outside the Golden Temple in Amritsar and in Gulbarga, Karnataka, Siddaramesh, editor of *Kranti* was stabbed five times in the back. Clearly, media personnel have become inviting targets for reprisal attacks from those they have exposed.

—COOMI KAPOOR



Narayan's widow and children weep over his body: brutal death

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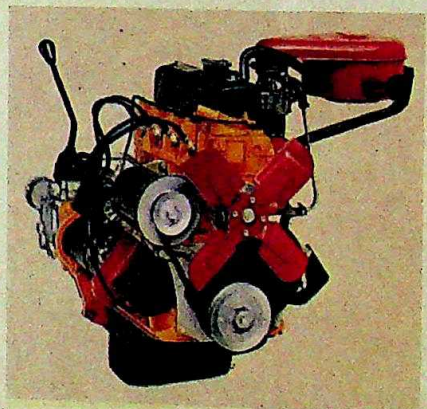
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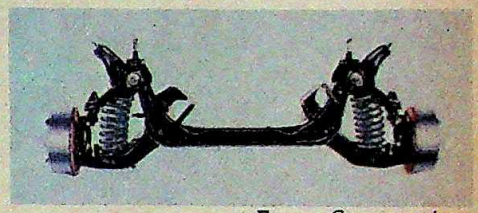
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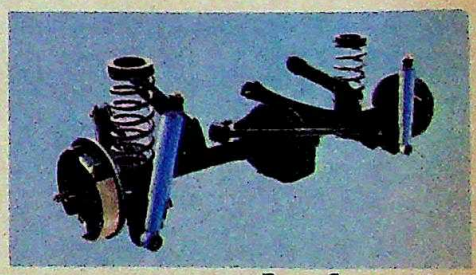
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Inventions that changed the world-III

DYNAMIK

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NAIR COMMITTEE

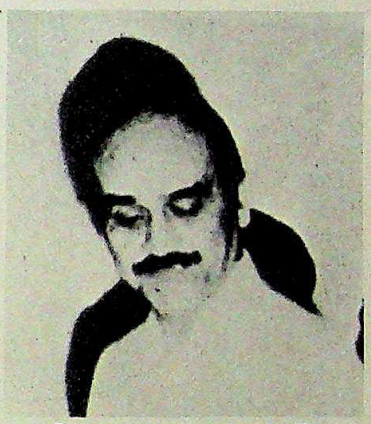
A Raw Repast

THE ASIAD jamboree relegated it to the back burner, but now, after 18 months on the boil, the long-awaited cadre review of India's intelligence services was presented to the Government last fortnight by its chef, Shankaran Nair, former head of Research & Analysis Wing (RAW). Tragically, the acronym of the organisation he once headed just about describes the dish that Nair has prepared. Though the contents of his report are stamped Top Secret—even its submission has not been made public—INDIA TODAY has gained some knowledge of its main ingredients which indicate that it will prove vastly unpalatable to a majority of the people it will affect in RAW and the Intelligence Bureau (IB), the two most sensitive intelligence organisations in the country.

Last August, when Nair finally sat down to his belated task as a one-man committee to look into the long—and long-standing—list of employee grievances and cadre bottlenecks in IB and RAW, his brief was simple: to draw up recommendations that would serve to overhaul the present cadre imbalance, and in the process, stem the rot that has set into both organisations for over five years now. But if his report is anything to go by, it will only add to the problems that are crippling IB and RAW.

One of his main recommendations, ironically enough, is the setting up of yet another agency over and above the existing two (RAW and IB). Nair's recommendation is that a third agency be created that would oversee the organisational and operational activities of RAW and IB to avoid overlapping and duplication and consequently, serious intelligence lapses. That there is consistent overlapping and major intelligence lapses as a result is now common knowledge and has been ever since the death of Bangladesh president Mujibur Rahman which RAW failed to predict, and more recently and locally with the events in Assam, Kashmir and Punjab. Just a few months ago, at the annual meeting of senior intelligence personnel, Mrs Gandhi lashed out at them for the lack of intelligence input on internal trouble spots, particularly Punjab which she declared angrily bore no relation to events on the ground and was "distorted beyond comprehension".

But Nair's "Third Agency" proposal is hardly going to change that situation. India had no warning of the orgy of blood-letting in Sri Lanka last year. Why? Because the RAW officer in Colombo was a Punjabi who had no knowledge of Tamil or Sinhalese and was therefore blind and deaf to the undercurrents that were coursing through the island just before the bloodbath. Even stranger is the fact the RAW man in Amritsar is a Tamilian who cannot speak a word of Punjabi. There is, however, a reason for their positioning. The man in Colombo has political influence and is part of the coterie that now controls RAW. He was given Colombo as a "foreign posting", a much-sought-after event in a RAW career. The other man in Amritsar happens to be a member of the RAW Employees Association and his shift to Punjab is part of the on-going process of victimising association members and breaking up their concentration in any one centre.



Saxena: "unproductive"



Nair: unappetising report

Another major recommendation made by Nair is the mass recruitment of personnel in RAW to replace people who are not considered fit for intelligence duties and also the large number who have either resigned, obtained transfers, or been suspended from the organisation for being suspected of association activities. But judging by the recent recruitment policy, it is blatantly apparent who the new recruits will be. From its inception, RAW has been snidely referred to as Relatives and Associates Wing and not without justification. A majority of its early recruits were Kashmiris brought by Ram Nath Kao, its first chief and it soon became standard practice to recruit relatives of all the top serving officers. Suntook, who recently relinquished office as RAW chief, followed much the same policy. Recently, however, it has become customary to recruit people who are relatives of political bigwigs irrespective of their abilities. Three relatives of former cabinet ministers have been recruited as OSD's (Officers on Special Duty) in the recent past. RAW's recruitment policy is now no different to any other government department.

Nair has also apparently made no effort to solve the crippling problem of men deputed from the police who have captured power in recent years and show no inclination of relinquishing it. Despite Mrs Gandhi's widely-publicised directive last year that all government employees who have been on deputation for more than four years and nine months be reverted back to their state cadres, RAW seems to have ignored it.

Currently, RAW has four officers in the rank of joint or deputy director who have been on deputation to the organisation for more than 25 years, six who have been there for more than 20 years, eight who have served more than 15 years and 17 who have been on deputation for more than 10 years. In other words, a total of 65 officers or 70 per cent of the senior officers in RAW are serving in direct contravention of the prime minister's orders.

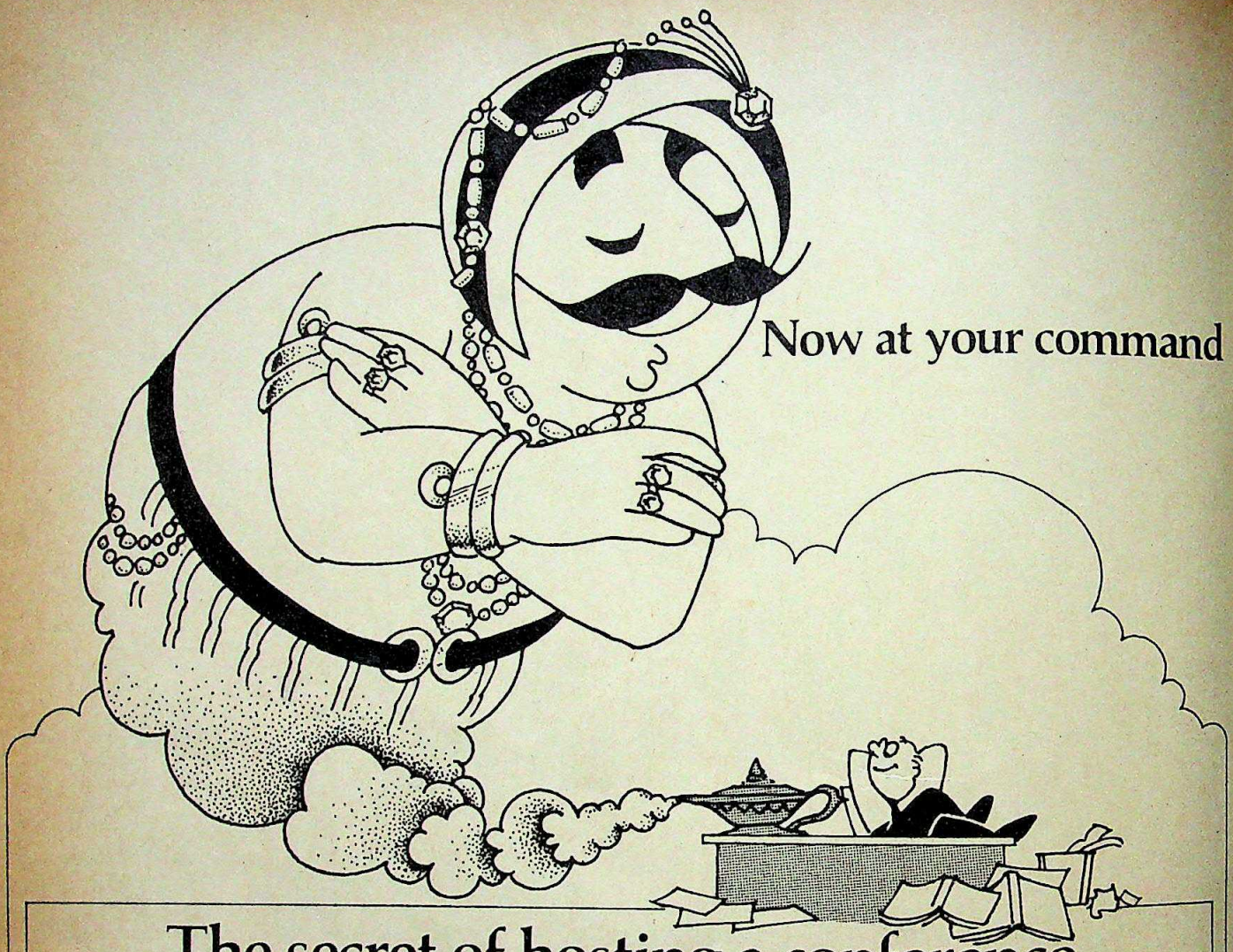
Not surprisingly, the current RAW boss Gary Saxena admitted at a Cabinet Secretariat meeting recently that RAW was "unproductive". The outfit is not free from the polticking that afflicts the Indian bureaucracy in general. For instance RAW officers have an official list of foreign posts which are marked "A" postings and "B" postings. Being intelligence operatives, their first priority rightly should be the neighbourhood from where most of India's intelligence is required. None of the neighbouring countries find place in the "A' list. Instead, the list is headed by Geneva followed by New York, Paris, Rome and other western capitals.

Tragically, the rot starts at the top. Since the departure of Kao and Nair, the calibre of RAW chiefs has left much to be desired. Suntook and now Saxena seem helpless to stem the cancer that has spread through RAW and its 7,000 employees. Both men surrounded themselves with a coterie of fawning officials with the result that they receive little respect from other employees. Instead, there is a constant state of confrontation and tension within the Lodi Road complex.

Last month, RAW offered some indication of its current priorities. It opened its latest office—in San Francisco. What intelligence RAW hopes to obtain from San Francisco defeats logic. Unless they hope to obtain intelligence on China from that city's large Chinese population. Even that would not be beyond belief. —DILIP BOBB

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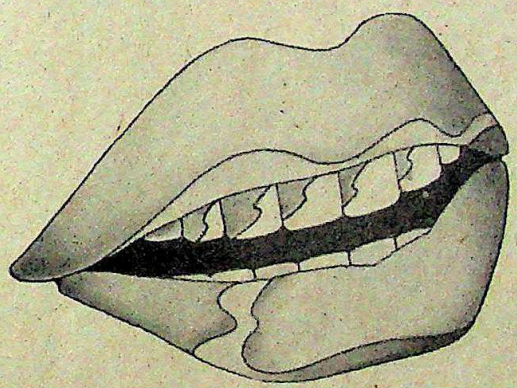
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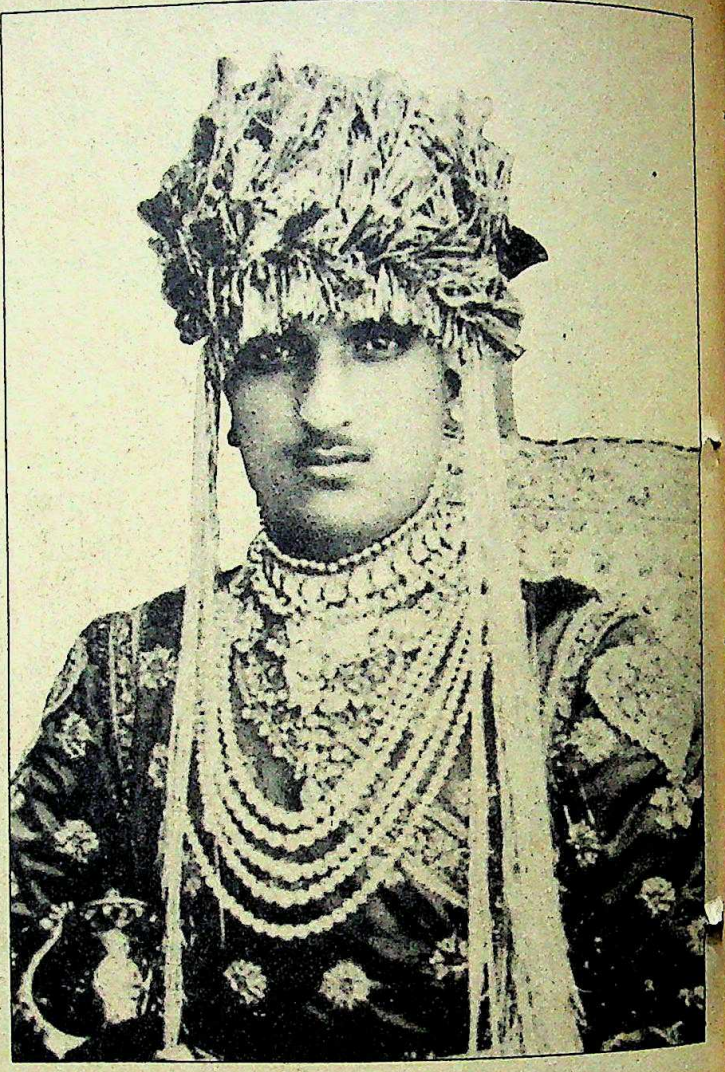
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Karan Singh's ancestor Gulab Singh and father Hari Singh: rich legacy

SRINAGAR JEWELS

The Court Case

THE NEWS broke last year, as the first winter winds began to blow in the Kashmir valley. In a dingy room in Srinagar, sealed in six tin trunks wrapped around with white cloth, lay one of the most fabulous hoards ever to have been accumulated by man. Then came the pictures: of glittering necklaces, of shimmering, jewel-studded dresses, of swords as priceless as they were deadly. Finally, as rumours spread that the jewels would be sold, following their evaluation by a London expert, arrived the controversy: who had the right to the treasure of the Dogra maharajas of Kashmir, cached away under the faithful eyes of an old retainer?

Last fortnight, nearly four months after the first reports, the controversy promised to become a socialite's salon staple for months to come. The Jammu & Kashmir High Court will begin hearings in March on a petition by Dr Karan Singh, "the son of Late Lt-General His Highness Maharaja Shri Hari Singhji the Ruler of the State of Jammu and Kashmir", which asks the high court to issue orders restraining the respondents from displaying or selling off the "heirlooms and private properties of the Petitioner kept in the Toshakhana, Srinagar and rightfully belonging to the family of the Petitioner". The respondents are the state of Jammu & Kashmir, to be represented by the chief secretary, and the Union Home Ministry, to be represented by the Union home secretary.



Karan Singh: high stakes

The petition also asks that the court issue orders to seal the property and appoint a government receiver until Dr Karan Singh's earlier petition to the Union Home Ministry is disposed of. This was sent to the ministry early in December 1983, and sets out in exhaustive detail the evidence which Karan Singh feels should confirm once and for all that the fabulous mass of jewels and gold is his.

The documents cited include: the one-and-a-half-century old *sanad* (a certificate of royal approval) conferred on Karan Singh's ancestor, Gulab Singh; then ruler of Jammu; the Treaty of Amritsar between

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Family heirlooms displayed by Hari Singh as a child: glittering past

Gulab Singh and the British Government concluded on March 16, 1846, by which the British earned the allegiance of the maharaja and sold Kashmir to him for the princely sum of Rs 75 lakh; the instrument of accession whereby Hari Singh surrendered his kingdom to the young Indian nation; and Hari Singh's will.

These are, however, just appetisers for the main course. The heart of both the petitions is a carefully compiled list which is at least a generation old and which sets out, over a score or so of pages, the description, the weight and the worth of the gold, the silver and the diamonds that were transferred from the Jammu Toshakhana to the Srinagar Toshakhana in 1951. The list is prefaced with a letter to the director general, tourism, Srinagar, from a certain Raja Ram Sharma, under-secretary to Government, General Department. The letter says in part that "the Hon'ble Prime Minister has been pleased to confirm the verbal orders given by him for removal from the Jammu Toshakhana to the Srinagar Toshakhana of the jewellery and gold ornaments".

"They were never lost," says Karan Singh, talking of the recent 'discovery'. "I had lists." Why then did he keep quiet when reports of the hoard appeared all over in the papers? He affirms: "While I was always aware of the fact that these articles belonged to my family as heirlooms, I did not until recently have occasion to apply my mind to the legal implications, specially the distinction between state property, family property and personal property."

Karan Singh's contention is that the jewels reposing in Srinagar are family heirlooms and are items of personal and private use that couldn't possibly be the property of the state.

Karan Singh's contention is that the jewels reposing in Srinagar are family heirlooms handed down through the generations and are items of personal and private use—necklaces, costumes, a variety of armlets and other ornaments to be worn on the person, gold and ruby toys which he used to play with, and a whole lot of other decades-old glitter that couldn't possibly be the property of the state. Asks the former ruler: "If every other former ruling family in India has got its heirlooms, why should my family be deprived of them?"

The stake is enormous, nothing less than the legacy of one of the wealthiest ruling families in India. The list put together a generation ago makes that quite clear: among the over 550 items are more than 50 *gulbands*, *kanthas* and *kanthis*, heavily-studded pieces of jewellery to be worn round the neck. They jostle for space in the trunks with over 30 *serpeches*, ornaments for the head. There are a score or so of *bazubands* traditionally worn on the arms.

The most impressive of the lot are pro-

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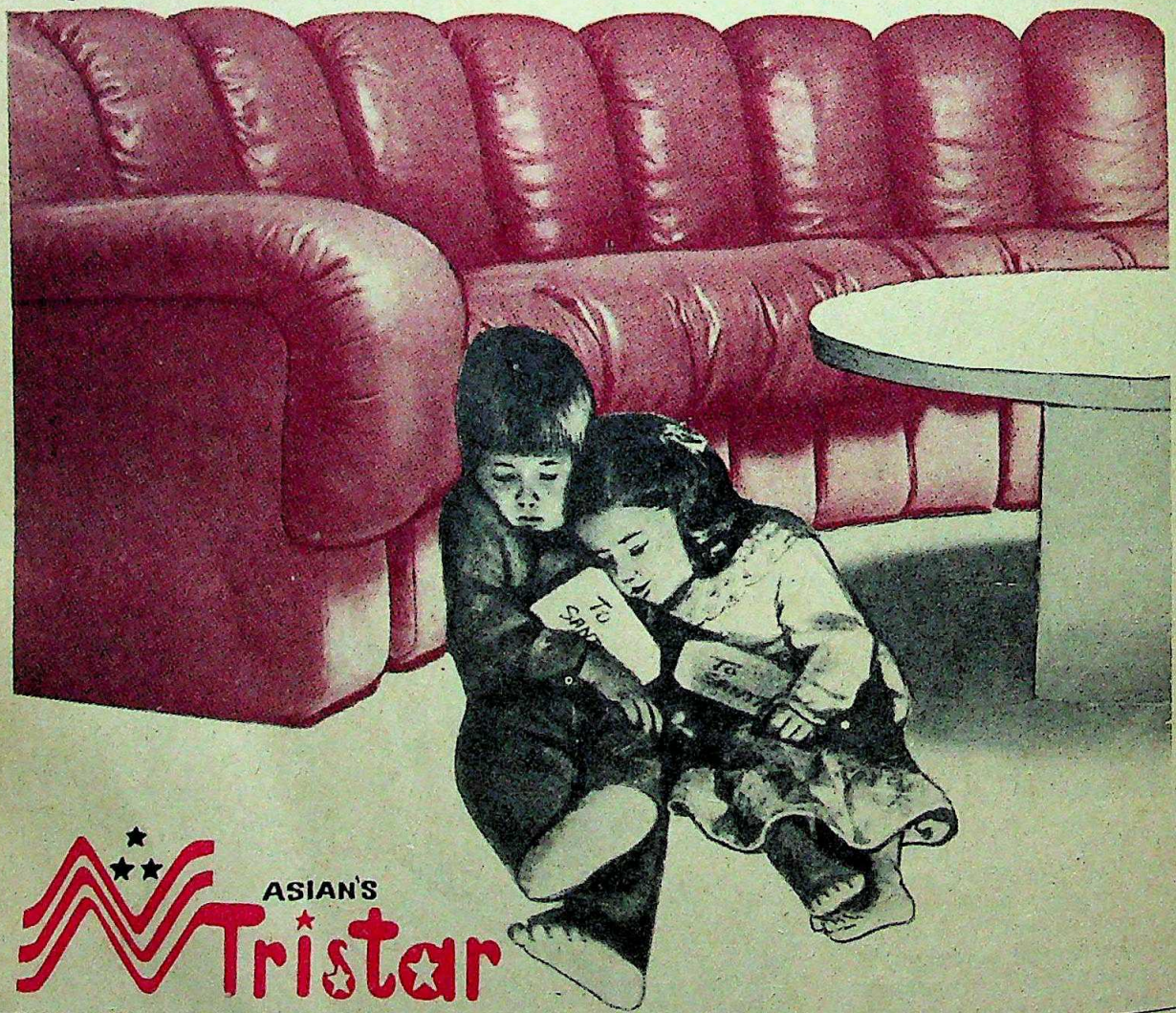
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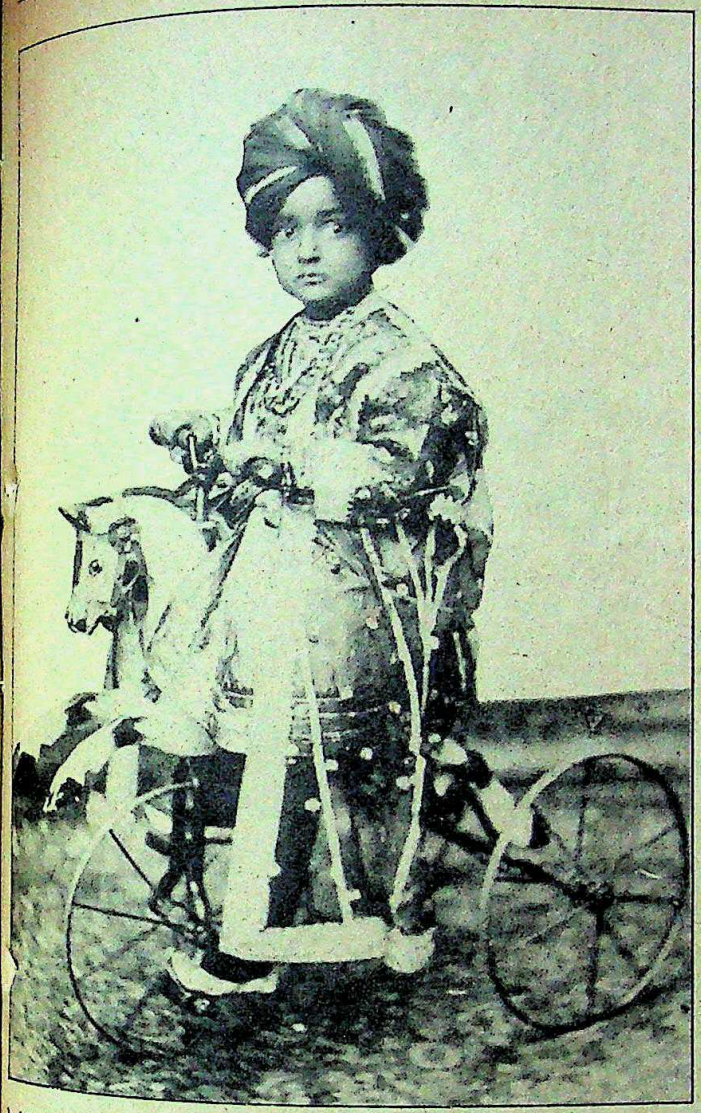
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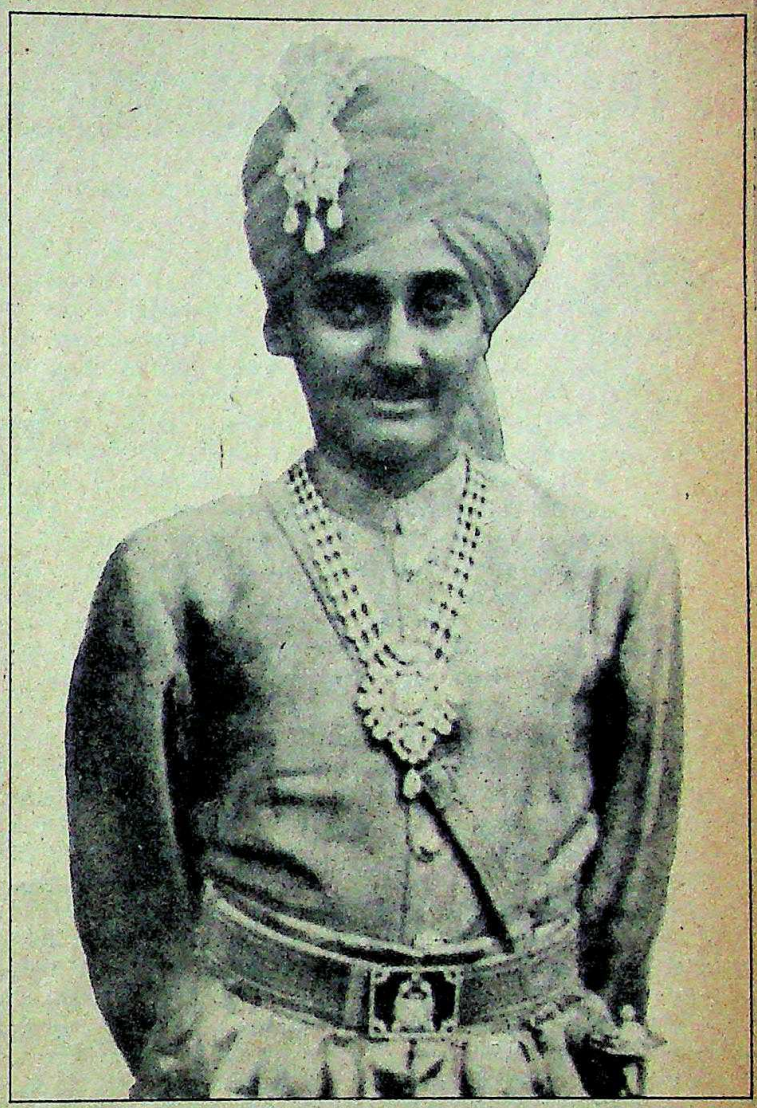
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Karan Singh on a tricycle (left) and sporting jewels as heir apparent

bably the *posteens* and velvet coats, dresses embellished with beautifully set precious stones. There are six of these, each more striking than the other. Seven swords are also listed as are a number of medals which, as the petition to the Home Ministry says, "were given by the British Empire to the rulers from time to time in appreciation of the meritorious services rendered by them".

The inventory doesn't end there. There are any number of bangles and rings which were used by, among others, the maharanis —nearly 20—over 160 years. The tally of wealth is completed by an assortment of watches, toys, utensils and coins—all gold. There is even a gold-plated *tooti*—a humble water tap.

The value of the hoard is immeasurable. For one, the pieces are very old—the authorities of that time estimated that most of them were acquired in the last century. The list gives the Hindu Samvat year of acquisition: a 'pearl and diamond *kantha*' is shown as dating back to 1802 and is the costliest item on the list, worth—the estimate is of a century ago—Rs 1.02 lakh. The pieces were all weighed according to the custom of that time, against silver rupee coins, annas and paise. The 'pearl and diamond *kantha*', for instance, weighs as much as 40 silver rupees and seven annas. This makes it a very precious piece of jewellery, yet it is only one of a large collection.

As the rupee value of the jewels dates back over a century, the total value given at the end of the list, of jewellery, gold, and dead stock (wooden boxes and suchlike), is meaningless. After all, nobody is likely to believe that the treasure of the maharajas, accumulated over decades by one dynasty, is worth only Rs 14 lakh. The current estimates range from Rs 900 crore to Rs 2,000 crore. Of course, no one has carried out a detailed inventory and evaluation and Karan Singh himself says that he has never seen the jewels since they were moved to Srinagar, not even after the news of their 'rediscovery' last year.

But he is taking great care with his case. His lawyer is S.K. Kandhari, who fought and won a similar case for the Jaipur royal family just after the Emergency, when the state laid claim to a large cache of emeralds found behind the walls of their palace. Nani Palkhivala is to argue the case in court on his behalf. And among the mass of documents that seek to convince everybody in general and the court in particular that the jewels are legally Karan Singh's personal property are a series of photographs that aim to show his father, grandfather and other ancestors actually wearing them.

Obviously, the state Government is in no mood to let the treasure slip away from its grasp without a struggle. Last fortnight, as the valley shivered under a fresh cold wave, it asked the court to hear its argument about why the petition should not be admitted, saying that it was "misconceived and not maintainable at law". The battle for the treasure has been joined, and with the stakes so precious, all indications are that it will last for a long time to come.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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BENAZIR BHUTTO

The Washington Connection



THE SUDDEN release of Benazir Bhutto from prison during the early hours of a cold January morning caught even Pakistan's ever-vigilant censors by total surprise. By all dictatorial common sense, the news of the freeing of General Zia's arch-rival and implacable political foe should have been blacked out or treated as an insignificant squib in the back pages of Pakistan's heavily-censored newspapers. But by a strange twist of irony the very secrecy that accompanied Benazir's release was also responsible for catapulting the story in screaming 48-point banner headlines—on the front pages of Pakistani newspapers.

Zia was so paranoid about the news of Benazir's release leaking out that he and Foreign Minister Sahabzada Yakub Khan did not even inform the Government's own censors about it. So at about one in the morning of January 10, when newspaper editors began calling the censors for guidelines on how they should handle the news they had received about Benazir's release, they found the censors befuddled. Pakistani newspapers had received the news from servants of the Bhutto household who had been despatched to their offices carrying a hurriedly-typed statement from Benazir in which she described her state of health and vowed to continue her struggle. But the censors themselves had received no guidelines from on high. The Karachi *Daily News* published not only the story under banner headlines but also the entire text of Benazir's parting statement.

Though Benazir has been reluctant to talk about her confinement and about how and why she won her freedom, INDIA TODAY has been able to piece the story together from US Government sources. It is a tale of international brinkmanship, of patience, diligence and tenacity. Ultimately, Benazir's freedom was precipitated by unrelenting pressure on the Reagan Administration and on the Government of Pakistan by the Senate and, in particular, by one senator—Claiborne Pell, the democrat from Rhode Island who occupies the important position of ranking minority member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Pell, a human rights activist, and an articulate opponent of Uncle Sam's annoying habit of cozying up to dictators, took up Benazir's cause almost from the very day he learned about her arrest in March 1981. And in what seemed at the beginning to be a hopeless task—after all, Zia had proved deaf to every entreaty to spare Benazir's father's life—Pell was ably assisted by Peter Galbraith. Galbraith, son of the celebrated ambassador to India and Harvard economist, had a personal interest as well. He and Benazir had been classmates at Harvard for four years and later, at Oxford, for two more. His father, John Kenneth Galbraith, a friend of Nusrat Bhutto, had recommended Benazir for admission. Peter Galbraith had met his wife through Benazir.

Now, as a member of the Senate staff, Galbraith would have an outside chance of helping a former classmate and friend find freedom; he would also test the strength of the Senate—the world's most powerful deliberative body—against the intransigence of a West Asian generalissimo. And he would have to forget the arid lessons of Harvard's theoretical textbooks on government and concentrate on helping his boss play the roulette for international realpolitik from Washington.

Things didn't look too good for Benazir in early 1981. Following the hijacking of the Pakistan International Airlines plane by Al Zulfikar, securitymen raided her home, seized all her personal belongings and papers as well as a few remaining mementoes of her father, and whisked her off to Sukkur Central Jail in the middle of the Sind Desert. She was confined in solitary to an unventilated "Class C" cell where the temperature would climb to 120 degrees Fahrenheit. She was given one bucket of water a day which she would pour over herself immediately.



On January 18, still unaware of the three year political drama played out in the power halls of Washington and Islamabad, Benazir was aboard a Swissair flight bound for Zurich.

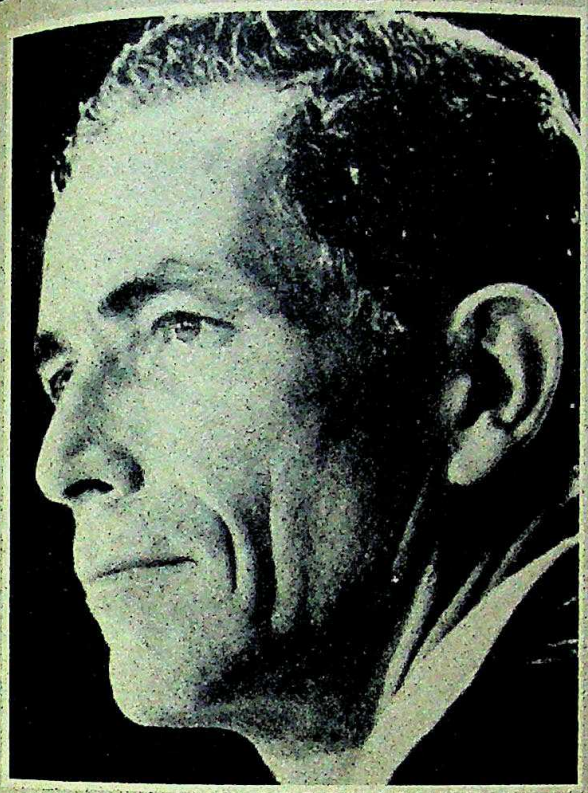
One American official told INDIA TODAY: "I'm convinced that the Zia regime was considering killing her that summer. They were putting out stories that Benazir was cracking up mentally. They prepared the condemned cell for her and talked about it in her presence. And they staged conversations within her earshot about her impending court martial."

Pell was receiving sketchy—but accurate—accounts of Benazir's incarceration. And even though he was determined to convey to Zia that if he played with Benazir's life and freedom it would be a costly course of action, he had no leverage with which to twist the General's arm. The deux ex machina arrived in the guise of the Pakistani military and economic aid package. The Reagan Administration, determined to show up Pakistan as a "frontline state" and anti-communist ally against Soviet expansionism had decided to give the Zia Government $3.2 billion in assistance over a period of time. And Reagan's henchmen were willing to pull out any and all stops with the United States Congress to accomplish this aim.

Pell was willing to do likewise in fulfilling his aim of trying to restore human rights in Pakistan. He got his first real opportunity in

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November 1981 when the Senate Foreign Relations Committee asked Under-secretary of State James Buckley to appear before it to answer questions about the proposed arms and economic aid to Pakistan including the sale of F-16 fighter planes.

Armed with recent testimony from Amnesty International on human rights violations in Pakistan, Pell began to rip into Buckley. "The F-16 is the most visible symbol of American support for the Zia regime," Pell thundered, "Amnesty International believes that human rights violations in Pakistan amount to a consistent pattern... do you feel they are correct?"

Buckley's answers were evasive. Pell continued his thrust: "Let me be very specific and talk about the Bhutto family for a moment. It appears as if President Zia is conducting a vendetta against the widow and daughter of executed—murdered—former prime minister Bhutto. Benazir was confined in an unventilated cell under appalling conditions. I am wondering if the Administration has made any representation to the Government of Pakistan about the confinement and maltreatment of the Bhutto family."

"There was no question about it," confided an administration source, "that Buckley got the clear message that the Pakistan package was in danger unless the State Department was willing to do some heavy arm-twisting in Pakistan on behalf of Benazir and other political prisoners." And Pakistan, apparently, got the message, loud and clear, because within a month Benazir was moved out of solitary confinement and placed under house arrest in Karachi.

But Pell's concern was clearly with the wider issue of human rights in Pakistan. "If we embark upon this new relationship with Pakistan," he told colleagues, "it would be with the country and not with a dictator with a narrow base." In pursuit of this aim he succeeded in passing into law a legislative amendment named after him that declares: "In authorising assistance to Pakistan, it is the intent of Congress to promote the expeditious restoration of full civil liberties and a representative government in Pakistan."

THE STRATEGY was to keep up the pressure, to play whatever trump cards came Pell's way through the $3.2 billion aid deal, to maximum advantage. He turned the screw tighter by taking the lead in opposing the sale of F-16s to Pakistan. In fact, the report on the debate starts with a hyper-critical evaluation of the internal situation in Pakistan. The Reagan Administration got the message that the Senate meant business on the issue of human rights in Pakistan not only from the speeches made by Pell and like-minded senators but also from two developments that scared the Administration out of its geopolitical boots.

First, Senator Mark Hatfield, a prominent member of Reagan's political party, attacked the Pakistan aid package and the "creation of a new relationship with the Zia Government" as "a gross waste of taxpayers' money". He went on to offer an amendment that would knock $200 million of the deal that received far more votes than the Administration's headcounters anticipated. Secondly, the final vote on the sale of F-16s to Pakistan also came within a handful of votes of giving the Reaganites an embarrassing defeat.

Encouraged by these unexpected successes, Pell and his supporters decided to battle on. The stage was now set for further confrontation and this came in the spring of 1982 when the Foreign Relations Committee reported that Pakistan's progress in human relations had not been satisfactory and that future assistance to that country would be adversely affected if the Zia regime did not shape up. In the light of the Hatfield amendment and the close vote on the F-16s, this was no empty threat.

So when Zia visited Washington in December 1982—partly to deflect the mounting criticism of his human rights record—he was well aware that at some date continuing American aid may depend on freedom for Benazir Bhutto. No sooner had he arrived for a meeting in the Senate than Pell handed him a letter co-signed by Senators Ted Kennedy, Alan Cranston, and Paul Tsongas demanding the release of Benazir and 14 other political prisoners. When Pell raised the question of Benazir's confinement in personal conversation with Zia, "Zia blew his cool," one observer recalled. "Zia accused Benazir of violating Pakistani laws. He said Benazir was kept comfortable, lived in a better home than any senator and had use of a private phone."

On learning that Benazir had use of a phone, Peter Galbraith picked up his own telephone in his senate office and dialled Karachi. He reached the Bhutto home and a police guard picked up on the other end. He told Galbraith he would not allow him to talk to Benazir; Galbraith told the guard that he had received permission from President Zia to place the call, but the guard hung up. He tried several other times to get through but couldn't.

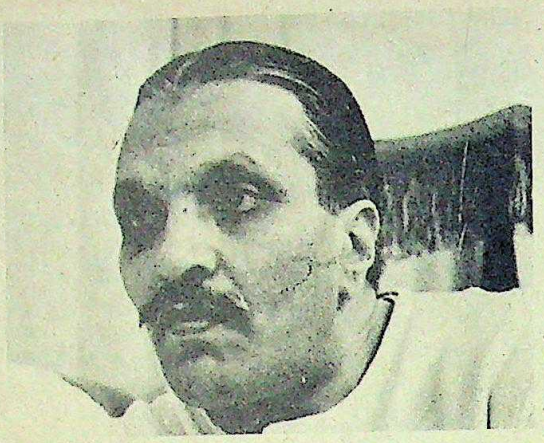
On June 27, 1983, several months after Zia's Washington visit, the Pakistan Foreign Ministry decided to respond to the letter the four senators had handed Zia. About Benazir, the Pakistani authorities wrote: "She is given all the comforts possible and doctors of her choice examine and treat her when required. She is allowed interviews with friends and relatives. Eight close relatives are allowed to stay with her in groups of three at a time. She is allowed to use 24 personal servants and has a telephone for her use."

But Pell was hearing otherwise and he so stated in a letter to the Pakistani ambassador. "I have received reports suggesting that Miss Bhutto's statement is significantly different than that described (in the June 27 letter)," Pell wrote. "I am advised that relatives and

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friends have considerable difficulty in obtaining permission to visit, often waiting several months or more. It is my understanding that in the six months prior to July 1, 1983, neither Miss Bhutto's sister Sanam nor her aunt Fakhri Gulzar Ahmad Khan have been allowed to see Miss Bhutto...when visits are allowed, they are restricted to half an hour, and that all conversation must be conducted in front of a policeman. I am also told that relatives are not allowed to stay with her and she is confined to a few rooms in the house. Apparently she is not allowed to use the garden."



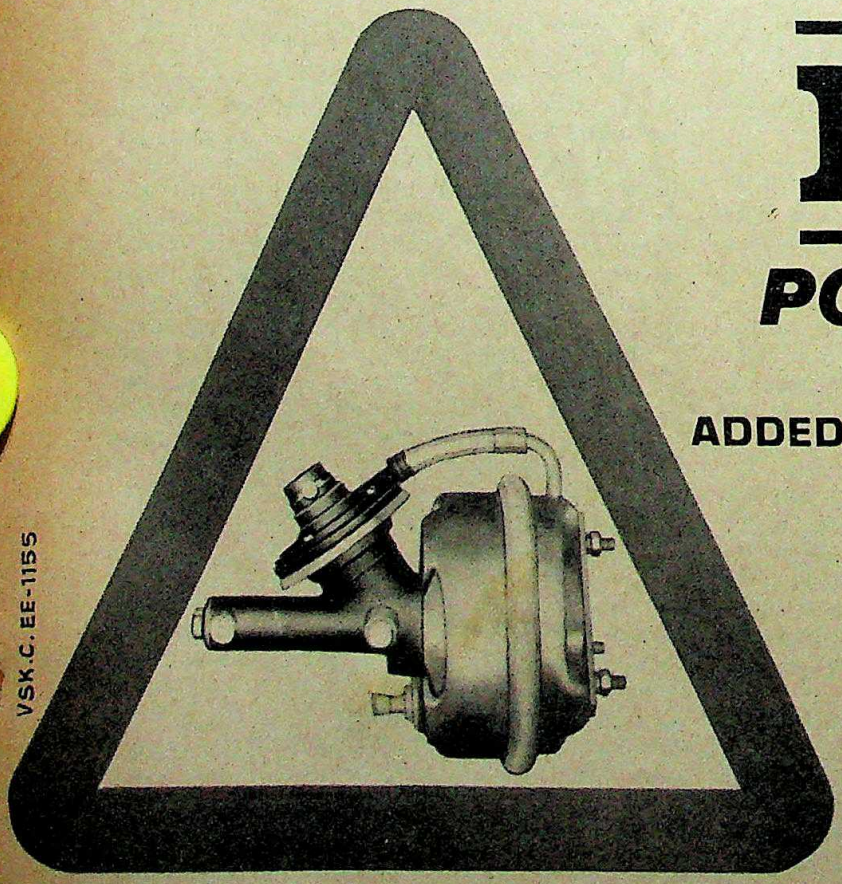
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When Yakub Khan visited Washington, Pell once again hammered away at the issue. Yakub Khan assured several senators that Benazir was permitted visits from friends and that they were misinformed about her treatment. Pell decided to call the Zia regime's bluff. He wrote a letter to Yakub Khan reminding him that "you advised us that Miss Bhutto was allowed to receive visits from friends".

The letter dated December 16, 1983, stated that Peter Galbraith, Benazir's personal friend, would be visiting Pakistan in January on official government business and should be allowed to visit Benazir. The letter was co-signed by Senator Charles Percy: the significance of this could not have been lost on Zia and Yakub Khan. Percy, the all-powerful chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had, for the first time, committed himself in writing to espouse the cause of Benazir's freedom. But Zia's Government remained silent.

Galbraith arrived in Rawalpindi in January and asked the foreign minister if they had a response to the Percy-Pell letter. There was still no answer. In the hope of seeing Benazir, Galbraith left for Karachi on January 9. He was scheduled to leave Pakistan two days later on January 11. Zia had one day left to respond. Zia or Yakub Khan would have to tell Galbraith on January 10 what they thought of the letter signed by the chairman and the ranking minority member of the committee.

Instead of responding directly to Galbraith, Zia sent word to his securitymen to free Benazir. At 12.30 a.m., on January 10, security forces told Benazir to pack her things. She had two hours to leave the country. At 2.30 a.m., still unaware of the three-year political drama played out in the power halls of Washington and Islamabad, Benazir was aboard a Swissair flight bound for Zurich. Galbraith learned of her freedom later that day from her relatives. He then flew to London for a long-awaited reunion with his Harvard classmate.



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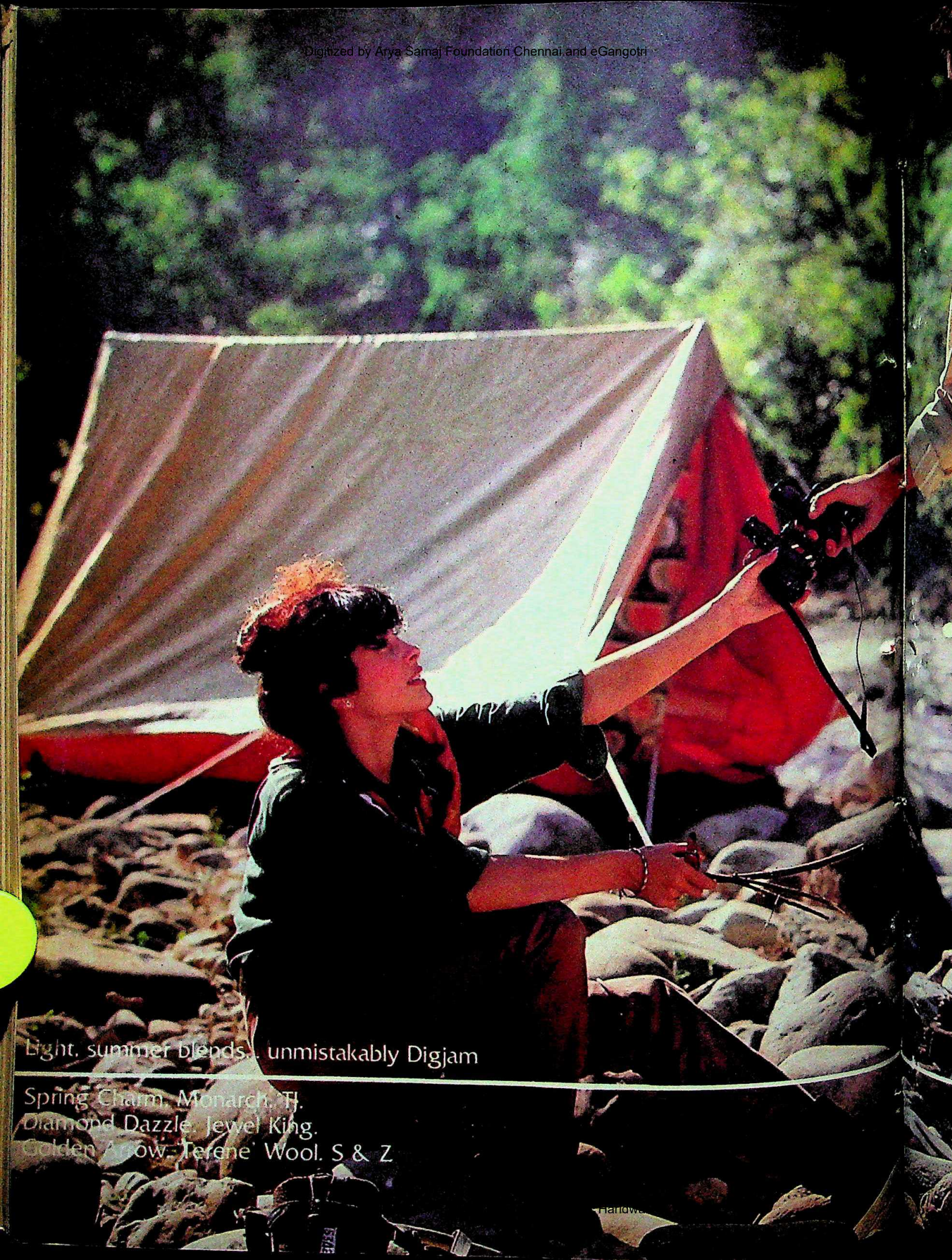
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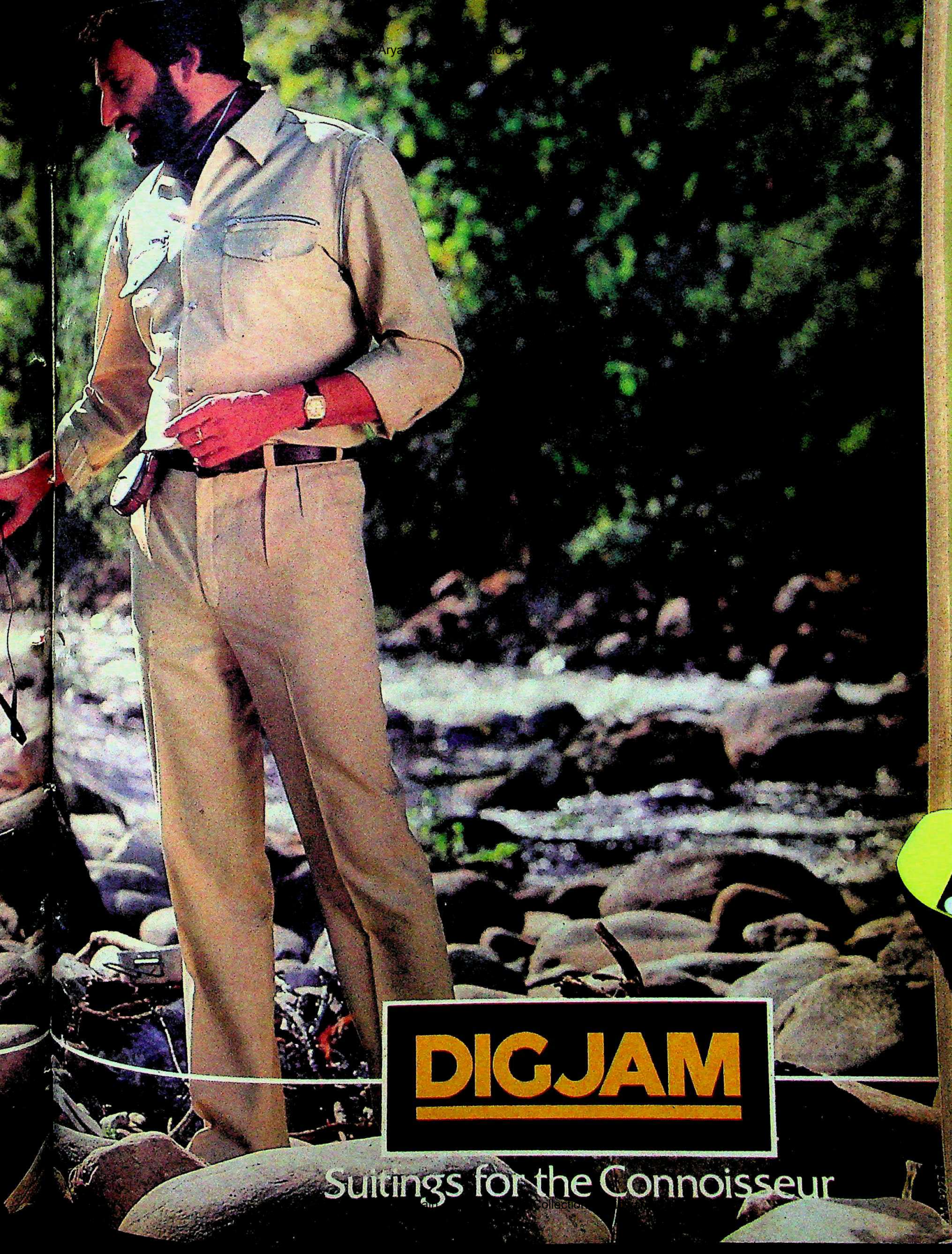


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CUBA

The Castro Charisma

NO LEADER in modern history has been so vilified by a series of US administrations—and so idolised by millions in the Third World—as Cuba's Fidel Castro. Recently, Bombay-born journalist PATRICIA J. SETHI *spent more than 20 hours with the Cuban President during the 25th anniversary celebrations of the Cuban Revolution. Below, Sethi's impressions of the charismatic elder statesman of the Third World:*

PRESIDENT FIDEL Castro first spoke to me in his simple yet elegant office in the Plaza of the Revolution in Havana— his first interview in five years. Puffing on a mildly aromatic Cohiba panatella, stroking his now greying beard, the magnetic Cuban leader was serious as he analysed what he obviously believes to be a dangerous situation in the hemisphere in the wake of the US invasion of Grenada. "The entire theory by which Reagan tried to justify the invasion is false; it is a total lie from head to toe," Castro said. "It was nothing more than a show of force; a cheap, political opportunistic operation designed to take advantage of the tragedy within the country with the murder of Maurice Bishop. Reagan exploited the US defeat in Vietnam, the deaths of 230 marines in Lebanon the week before, the humiliating experience of the US hostages in Iran to present to the American people a great victory in Grenada. That's dangerous. That's irresponsible policy which can lead to war and adventurism in El Salvador and Nicaragua and Cuba."

Castro was quiet, contemplative and mellow throughout most of the interview —a sea change from the volatile, excitable leader of yesteryear. But the flame of the revolution still flickers in his eyes, there is passion in the way he jabs the air to underscore a point, there is a sense of urgency in his voice as he leans forward to clarify an issue.

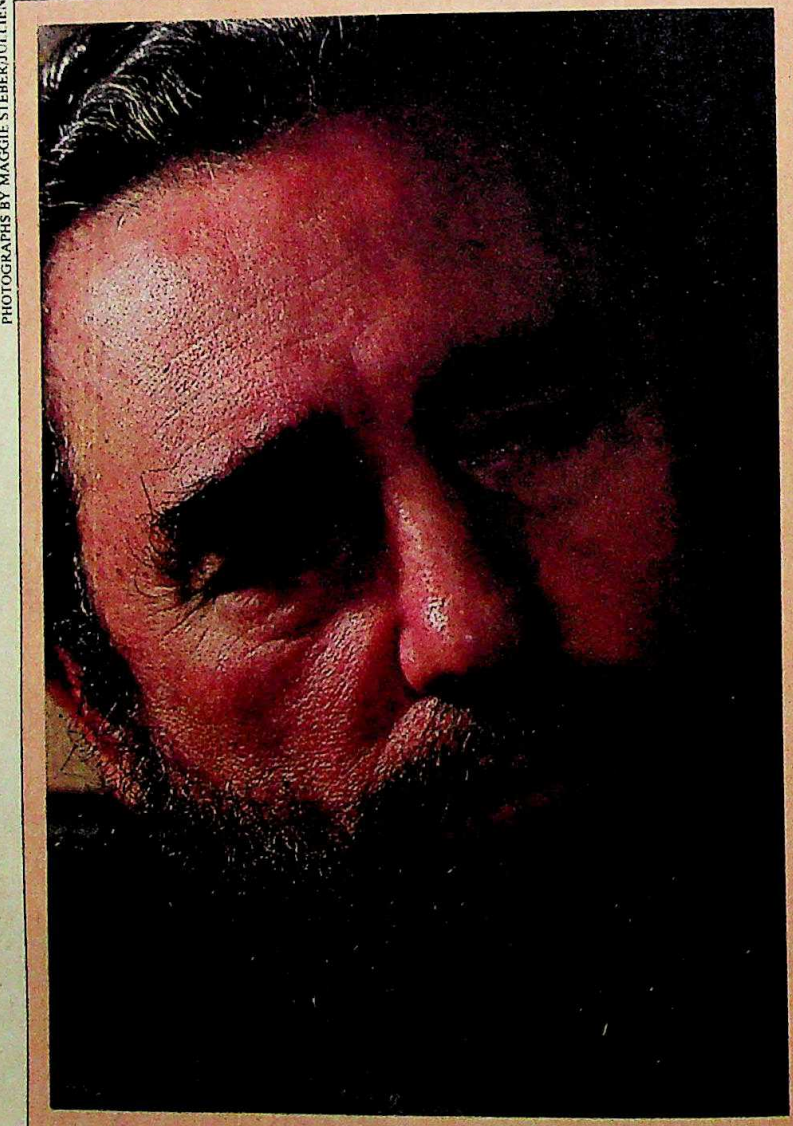
His eyes are the most fascinating part of Fidel Castro: they bore through you, they penetrate you as if he is trying to figure you out, to make sure you understand his argument, to size up your comprehension of Third World matters. He dresses simply: the green fatigues which have become his trademark, an inexpensive digital watch strapped to his wrist, army boots which he placed on the marble table in front of him as he relaxed midway through the conversation.

His anger was apparent at what he perceives to be a reactionary administration in Washington—but he was at pains to differentiate between the Reagan Government and the American people. He wants good relations with the people of the United States but not with the current administration, unless and until they stop viewing policy options through the narrow, simplistic East-West prism, he said.

He reiterated time and again that he was not exporting revolution to Central America: revolution is not an exportable commodity, he argued. "We cannot export revolution anymore than the US can prevent it." Revolution in his opinion is the end result of oppressive internal conditions within a political system: poverty, social and economic tyranny which when left to ferment encourage the growth of revolutionary ideology and eventually bring about change.

Castro is not averse, however, to aiding such revolutionary development through moral and material support. He wants a negotiated settlement in Central America through the Contadora process but believes that "the US Administration is not interested in a political solution but in a policy of intervention and force". He is disturbed by consistently "hostile and negative propaganda" against him in the United States. "It has been going on for 25 years—except for a short break in the late'70s during the Carter period; it is so irrational," he said. "The hatred is so unfair and it is only because we rebelled. We would not toe the Yankee line."

The Fidel Castro who took me on a six-hour tour of his country was extremely relaxed, full of wit, warmth, enthusiasm and charm. He is always gracious, apparently sincere, honest and for-



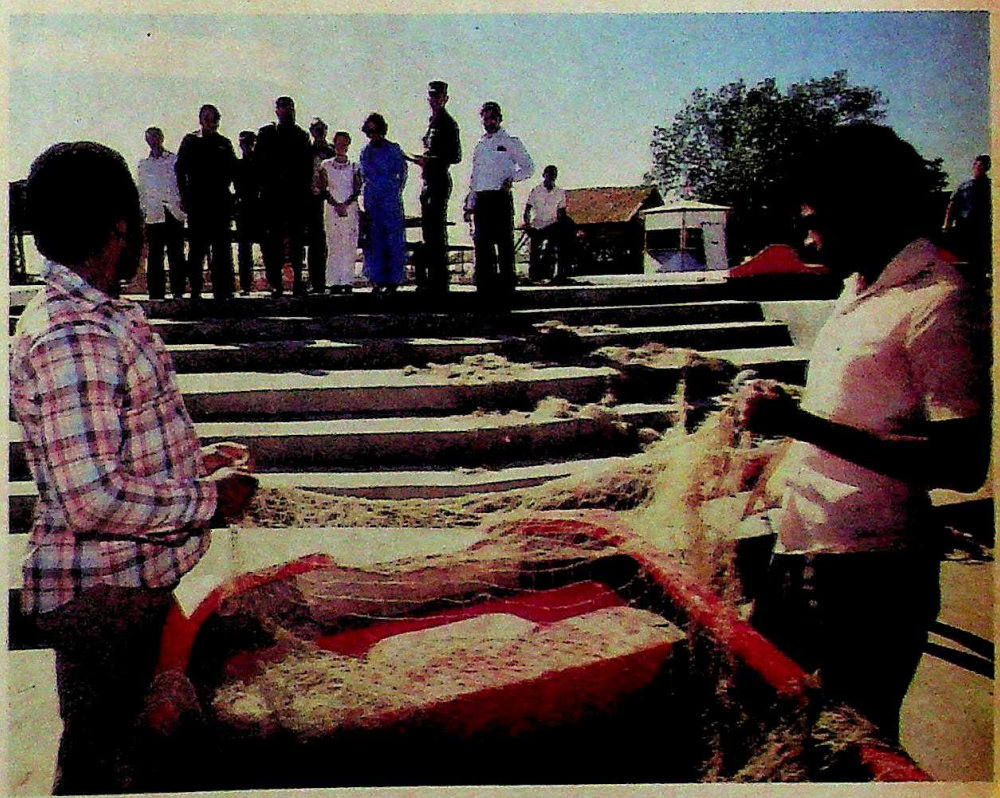
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MAGGIE STEBERJUI LIEN

Castro is mercurial; he can switch from the tease, the scamp, the witty leader to a deadly serious person in a split second. It is one Fidel when he kids the teenagers, it is a totally different Fidel when he listens to complaints about prices.

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...bright. A far cry from the Castro they paint in the United States: the scheming devil who spends his entire day plotting the overthrow of capitalism.

That certainly appeared to be furthest from his mind that morning as he pointed out the majestic Sierra Maestra range cresting upwards from the coast, where he and his band of 12 guerrillas began the Cuban Revolution in 1953; the blue lagoon sparkling in the Caribbean sun where he goes swimming for two kilometres at a stretch to keep fit; the bay further ahead where he goes deep-sea fishing and diving to keep his lungs strong. "My motto for good health is simple," he said. "Eat less, sleep less and exercise a lot." That is probably why his skin is so youthful his physique trim, his head and beard full; he looks years younger than his actual 57.

We toured the region around Santiago de Cuba, the President's jeep leading the way—an automatic rifle strapped to the dashboard. Two jeeps carrying Cuban soldiers followed right behind with a red Lada carrying aides bringing up the rear. "Keep your eyes on the road," Castro teased our baby-faced driver, Colonel Robertico Valdes, a former fighting comrade and now a senior Interior Ministry official. "I hope you have a good insurance policy," he said to me. "With this guy at the wheel, you'll need it."

The purpose of the trip was to view Valdo's Fantasyland ("We Socialists can have fantasies too," quipped the President): a major beach resort which is being built for the people of Cuba on the waterfront outside of Santiago. It comprises cabanas where an entire family can spend their required annual one-month vacation for a meagre $8 (Rs 80) a day including food and recreation.

Recreational facilities include the largest natural swimming pool in the world (Valdes has forded off a section of the lagoon), a safari-zoo with animals running loose in a natural habitat, an aquarium, an indoor model-city for children and a giant prehistoric park with 18 ft to 20 ft tall dinosaurs. Along the waterfront, there are campsites and boats to take the families bobbing out there on fishing expeditions and horseyrides in the bay. There is a ferris wheel and an amusement park for children. There is even a discotheque with revolving disco lights for adults at night. "Yankee music and Yankee lights," said Castro. "See, we are not a closed society; we borrow elements from the West."

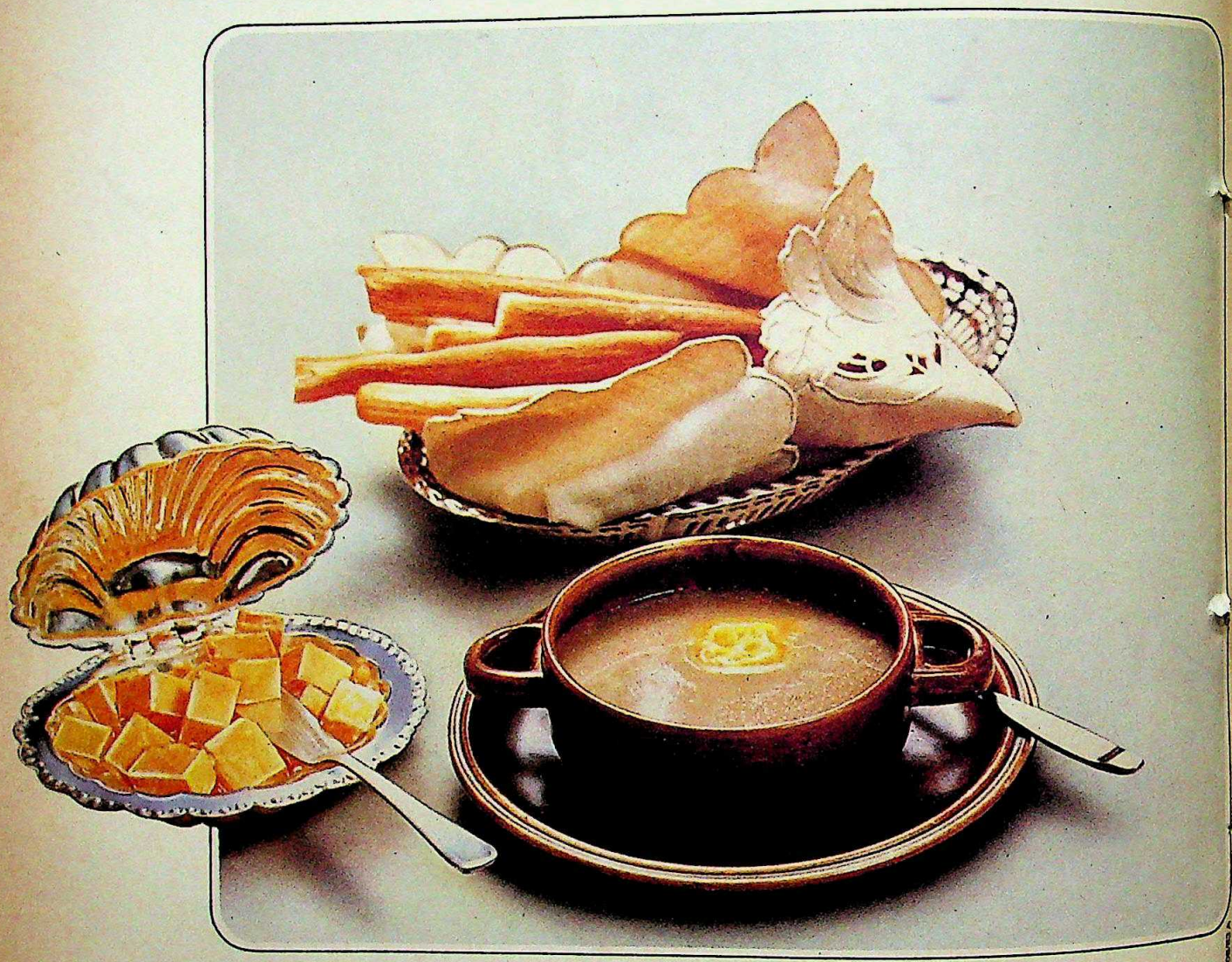
As we stopped at various sites en route and people recognised him, they poured out to meet him, to surround him, to hug him, to

Fidel Castro mixes with his people (top), surveys the day's fishing catch and checks the day's menu: larger-than-life figure

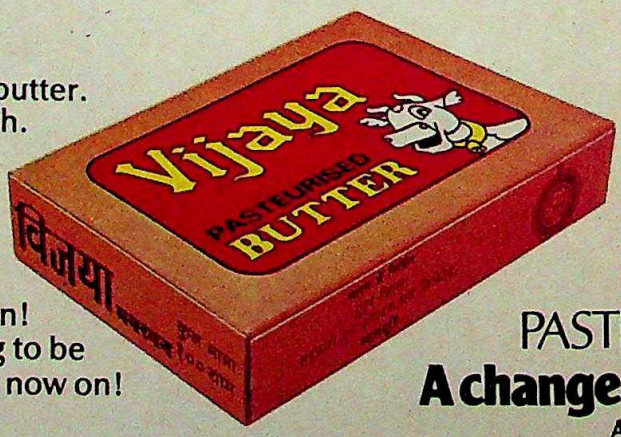
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touch him, shouting out: "Fidel! Fidel!" An elderly black woman embraced him hysterically, crying out that her dream had come true: she had met Fidel at last. A heavyset man pumped Castro's hand, speechless.

"You must be a chef," said Castro, joking with him—humour being an essential element of Castro's philosophy of life. "I can see that you have been sampling more of the food than you have been serving." Children clung to his fatigues, asking him if they could get him food and drink.

He teased a pretty young woman whose hair was wrapped in rollers. "Going out partying tonight with your boy-friend eh?" he asked. Yes she was. "Who is he? Where is he from? What does he do for a living?"

CASTRO unquestionably has charisma. He spent a few minutes at each spot with his people, but the few moments he spent he was totally involved. He never appeared distant, he never appeared preoccupied with his thoughts, he was a total natural. It was like being with a politician on the campaign trail, as he pressed the flesh and concerned himself with the concerns, however ordinary, of his people.

"How is the catch today?" he asked a couple of fishermen hauling in a net. "Can you get fresh vegetables easily?" he asked the manager of a local kitchen. "Is the meat cheap?" And his aides registered complaints while he listened quietly, seriously.

Castro is a quicksilver, mercurial personality: he can switch from the tease, the scamp, the funny and witty leader to a deadly serious person in a split second. It is one Fidel when he kids the teenager with rollers in her hair; it's a totally different Fidel when he listens to a complaint about prices. Then his eyes fill with genuine concern, the brow furrows intensely. And it was apparent that the hundreds of people we met along the way care deeply for him.

Valdes' million-dollar Fantasy is scheduled for completion in 1988—but the initial phase is already finished, well before the expected deadline. "The man is an earthquake, he typifies the dedicated spirit of most Cubans," Castro said. "First he puts up the structure, then he asks Havana for permission. One hundred men like Robertico and they won't need me in Cuba. They'll run the country." He added with a puckish grin: "I'll have to go into exile—in the United States."

The hot sun finally took its toll and the convoy headed for home base. That turned out to be a charming little hide-out in the hills—a guest-house complex of small cottages, fully equipped with air-conditioners, bedrooms and bathing facilities. Refreshments appeared; Castro drinks sparingly: a little Cuban rum with loads of ice.

He is a delightful host, extremely solicitous, paying attention to minute details. He informed us that we were in for an Arabian feast and pointed to the garden where cooks were preparing three full lambs to place on spits over open coals. The President checked the basting sauce to make sure the garlic was sufficient. He checked the hammocks swinging from the trees for the siesta after the meal. He hammed it up in one, pretending to be asleep even while he puffed on his cigar. He loves hammocks, having grown used to them as a guerrilla fighter in the '50s. He always carried one and when he was exhausted, hung it up and took a nap.



He is at pains to explain that he likes the people of India; he finds them among the most intelligent and profound people in the world.

Vice-President Carlos Rafael Rodriguez reminisced how Castro would string up his hammock and sleep like a child on the guerrilla march—even as danger lurked all round. "You cannot worry about the future," Castro remarked, and that appears to be a crucial tenet in his survival against formidable odds and more than 20 attempts by the CIA on his life. "If you worry about life or every move for that matter, you won't be able to take a step forward."

As we sat in rocking chairs on the porch waiting for the rest of the guests to arrive, Castro talked about India and things Indian. His respect and admiration for Prime Minister Indira Gandhi are apparent; he spoke of her in the warmest possible terms: calling her "very intelligent, politically astute, charming and gracious". He was delighted with his visit to India during the Non-aligned Summit last year: "I slept soundly in India," he said—a comment which was interpreted by aides to mean that he felt totally relaxed.

He is particularly impressed with the gutsy quality of Indian women, their courage and sense of independence. And they still retain their feminine qualities and quiet elegance, he pointed out. Some women who have impressed him: Mrs Gandhi and Margaret Alva. He is quite tuned in to the struggle for independence and familiar with the history of India's revolutionary heroes: Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru and Patel. He has seen the Gandhi film and enjoyed it.

He is at pains to explain that he likes the people of India: he finds them to be among the most intelligent and profound people of the world. They are philosophers, they have depth, he reiterated over and over again. And yet they are a practical people, he pointed out. He was struck by their organisational skills and the fact that they arranged the Seventh Non-aligned Summit in such a professional manner in so short a time.

He expressed the hope that Mrs Gandhi would accept his long-standing invitation to visit Cuba. He quite obviously wants closer ties with India, despite the geographical distance, because he believes both peoples can learn much from the exchange. He mentioned the Birla group which is involved in providing management expertise for two textile plants in Cuba. And the Sarabhais, who are being tapped for their expertise in setting up a drug manufacturing factory in Cuba.

It was now around three in the afternoon and the guests had started to arrive: among them, Nobel Prize-winning author Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Henry Ruiz "Modesto" of Nicaragua, the President of Cuba's National Assembly Flavio Bravo, the Vice-President of Cuba Carlos Rafael Rodriguez and his beautiful wife Mirta, the Chief of the Communist Party of Santiago Ramon Balaguer. It could have been an average weekend barbecue, so great was the bonhomie and camaraderie.

Everyone appeared as natural with Castro as he was with them. They laughed and joked together about 25 years of revolution and how they still find it hard to believe that they survived in the face of such strong odds. They reminisced together about their initial sense of shock after winning the battle against Batista: how a vacuum set in when they realised there was no enemy left to fight. They recalled their initial bravado when they believed they were invincible even though they did not know the basics about organising or running a government.

They talked of the long, tortuous route, filled with problems and mistakes, to the 25th anniversary. And they felt good about their achievements: Cuba's number one ranking in the Third World in sports, education (96 per cent literacy), health (a medical system on par with the West—and totally free), low infant mortality rates. And the fact that they have endured for 25 years.

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KASHMIRI TERRORISTS

Threatening Revenge

BRITISH Kashmiris have vowed to avenge the death of Maqbool Butt. In their eyes, the man the Indian Government hanged as a murderer and criminal was a faultless freedom fighter. Already a hero while he lived, after his death he has become a martyr and a legend.

"Well I think, and everybody, every reasonable Kashmiri thinks that there will be more bloodshed and there will be more incidents like that of the killing of the diplomat." That warning was coldly delivered this week by the President of the biggest British Kashmiri organisation, the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), Amanullah Khan, one of the two men initially detained by the police for over 72 hours in connection with the murder of the Indian diplomat in Birmingham.

But Khan's prediction was by no means unique. It was just one of many that poured forth from several quarters of the Kashmiri community. Hashim Qureshi, the man convicted for the 1971 Indian Airlines hijack from Srinagar to Lahore, and also detained by British police earlier this month, was no less explicit. "Kashmiris will avenge the murder of Maqbool Butt. They will do so within India and within Kashmir, but they will also do so outside India and outside Kashmir," he said.

As if that wasn't enough, there were already signs last week that enraged Kashmiris in Birmingham, the city where Ravindra Mhatre was kidnapped, are preparing for this revenge. Mohammad Younous, general secretary of the Kashmiri Workers' Association, believes that Kashmiris have begun joining the terrorist Kashmir Liberation Army (KLA), the previously unknown group who claim to have killed Mhatre.

Said Younous: "Yesterday I met many Kashmiri youth and they were all asking if the KLA existed somewhere and they wanted to join it. They wanted to start war all over the world. Because, you see, we have nothing to lose."

That the Kashmiri community in Britain is seething with tension and now hungry for revenge is beyond doubt. But, to fully understand this excitable and volatile atmosphere, one needs to trace the community's history back to its roots.

Britain's 1 lakh Kashmiris, almost to a man, have come from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. In fact, they are basically Mirpuris. Very few hail from other areas like the three districts of Muzafarabad, Poonch and Kotli. This means that they are not only disposed towards being pro-Pakistani and anti-Indian, but also that they have never accepted the accession of Kashmir to India. As Mushtaq Kashmiri of the JKLF puts it: "British Kashmiris react very strongly against the accession, indeed any idea of the accession with India, because they think that India has no constitutional or legal or historical claim over Kashmir."

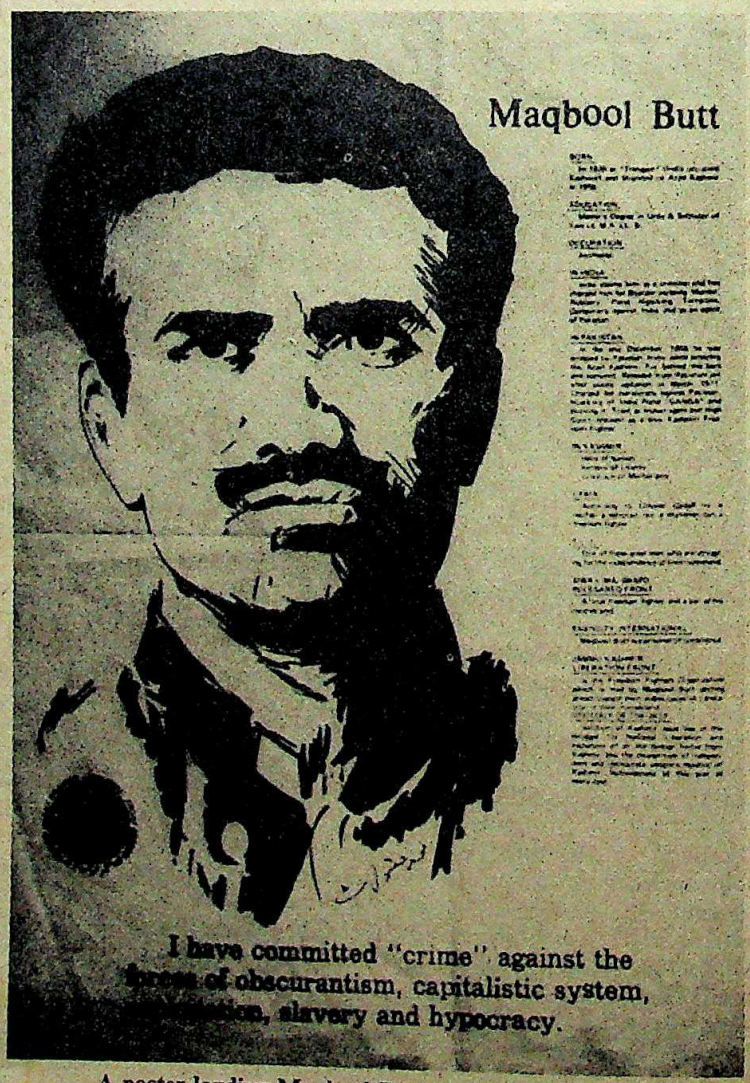
And when in the late '50s and early '60s their homes in Mirpur were flooded by the construction of the Mangla Dam, the Kashmiris emigrated to Britain bringing with them their firmly-rooted prejudices. Once in the UK these translated into a proliferation of organisations which were formed to voice their own particular politics.

The early organisations were bodies such as the Plebiscite Front, the Kashmiri Workers' Association, the Jammu Kashmir Liberation League, the Muslim Conference, the Pakistani Kashmiri Organisation and the Azad Kashmir Front. Many of these maintained links with parent bodies in Pakistan, the best-known of which was perhaps the Jammu Kashmir National Liberation Front, founded in 1965 by Maqbool Butt and Amanullah Khan amongst others.

In 1976-77, a new British Kashmiri organisation appeared and sought to radicalise and toughen their response to politics. It was the JKLF. Some of its members came from two earlier bodies, the Plebiscite Front and the Azad Kashmir Front, whilst others, like Amanullah Khan, came from Pakistan where they had been colleagues of Maqbool Butt in the Jammu Kashmir National Liberation Front. The link of the new JKLF with Pakistan and with Butt was clear and strong.

On September 12,1982, the JKLF itself split. The division was said to be over internal political disputes. But it is now well known that what underlay the rift was the desire of Amanullah Khan and his supporters to take increasingly tougher and more widespread action against India. And from then the steps taken by British Kashmiris against India have been harder and sharper.

Until 1982 Kashmiris in Britian had basically resorted to peaceful political demonstrations. To begin with, every Indian prime minister from Jawaharlal Nehru onwards faced their protests on each visit to London. Then, in the '70s, several Kashmiri organisations openly sided with Pakistan against India at the time of the Bangladesh crisis. The climax of this action came in 1973 when three Kashmiri boys attempted a hold-up at the Indian High Commission in London. Police mistook their toy pistols for real weapons, and in the ensuing affray two of them were killed. It led to a massive Kashmiri demonstration in Hyde Park.



A poster lauding Maqbool Butt: strident propaganda

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JKLF demonstrations in Britain (top) and Holland: growing militancy

But, with the September 1982 split in the JKLF ranks, there's been a dramatic escalation in the nature of British Kashmiri activity. To begin with they broadened their focus and began to operate not only in Britain but internationally as well. Thus, in June 1983, as Mrs Gandhi visited Denmark, hundreds of Kashmiris staged a vociferous protest at Copenhagen Airport. It captured the headlines and made prime time television. Again, in September last year, as the prime minister addressed the United Nations General Assembly, Kashmiris circulated an open letter among the delegates. In it they accused India of "imperialist and colonialist" behaviour in Kashmir.

However, the most important step taken by the new militant JKLF leadership under Amanullah Khan was to extend its operation back into the subcontinent itself. Until then British Kashmiris had not interfered directly in Kashmir. In October 1982 the JKLF opened a branch in Rawalpindi and another in Azad Kashmir thus openly aligning itself with Pakistan. Farook Haider and Majid Amjad Butt (Maqbool's brother) were chosen to head the finance and publicity committees of the Pakistani branch of the JKLF. But the man chosen as the chairman of the all-important organising committee was none other than Hashim Qureshi, the convicted Indian Airlines hijacker.

From then onwards, with Qureshi's contacts and help (his family live across the border in Srinagar) the JKLF began to secretly circulate in Indian Kashmir pamphlets calling on Kashmiris there to fight for their independence and secede from India. Today, according to Amanullah Khan, the JKLF has some 1,000 members in Pakistan with offices in Rawalpindi, Muzafarabad and Mirpur. In Britain, he estimates the "active membership" is 600 and the "sleeping membership" at about the same. The organisation's head office is in Birmingham, with branches in Halifax, Rochdale and Bolton in the Midlands, and Aylesbury, Watford and Luton in the Greater London area. Outside Britain and Pakistan, the JKLF has offices in France, Denmark, two in Holland (The Hague and Amsterdam), two in Germany (West Berlin and Stuttgart) and even in New York. According to the JKLF constitution an office can be opened anywhere where the organisation has over 20 members. In some European cities the membership figures are no more than 35.

This was the political background of the British Kashmiri community at the time of the kidnapping and murder of Ravindra Mhatre. The KLA, who have claimed responsibility, may or may not have been heard of before. The important point is that their action and their militancy have roots that were by 1984 well established within the Kashmiri community, and later, when they struck, commended by it. And it is precisely in that same spirit and atmosphere of support and shared conviction that the Kashmiri community is today furious at the hanging of Butt, just five days after Mhatre's murder.

Just how involved some of its members were in that murder ought to be clearer in the next few weeks. Last Friday's arrest of 27-year-old Abdul Quyyam Raja, a Paris-based Kashmiri of still unknown nationality, marks the first breakthrough in an investigation which has pulled in some of the prominent Kashmiris in Birmingham including Khan and Qureshi. How far it will reach remains to be seen, but it will be a tragedy if the authorities stop at investigating the murder and don't take the threats of retaliation seriously.

—KARAN THAPAR

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PAKISTAN

Angry Aftermath

FOR MOST Indians, Maqbool Butt's long-delayed execution in Tihar jail last month was no more than the final act in a long legal process that culminated all too tragically with the killing of Ravindra Mhatre in Birmingham. In Pakistan, last fortnight, Butt was being elevated to the status of a national hero. Anti-Indian to an unbelievable pitch, widespread protests in the Pakistan part of Kashmir and angry student demonstrations in Islamabad were followed by readings of *namaz-e-janaza*, or funeral prayers, in almost all cities.

In the corridors of power, voices remained muffled till President Zia-ul-Haq, cornered by reporters on his way to attend Andropov's funeral in Moscow, declared Butt a freedom fighter. Official silence was broken five days after Butt's execution when senior members of the Pakistan Foreign Office, taking a cue from the President, dubbed it "a decision of a vindictive nature". In Karachi, students went on the rampage outside the Indian consulate and the Indian Airlines office in the city, damaging an official car in the stoning.

If the reaction in Pakistan seemed closely aligned with the reaction among Kashmiris in Birmingham, it was indicative of the close links that exist between the community in England and its mentors in Pakistan. Although no official connection has been publicly established—beyond the fact that the Pakistan ambassador in 1976 sent a message of goodwill to the so-called Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) when it brought out its publication, *Voice of Kashmir*—strong community ties bind the UK Kashmiris with those in Pakistan Kashmir. And, talk of vengeance in Birmingham (*previous page*) was echoed strongly in Pakistan.

Not surprisingly, it was Butt's family which seemed most articulate in voicing these sentiments. Talking to INDIA TODAY in her home in the old Karimpura section in the heart of Peshawar, Butt's widow Zakira, 47, who hails from Chikmagalur in Karnataka, bluntly described it as an act of vengeance by the Indian Government saying that earlier, listening to the Urdu servive of the BBC since 1981, she had been convinced that Butt would not be hanged. He had nothing to do with the so-called Kashmir Liberation Army, she averred and sought to justify his blowing up of the Indian Airlines Fokker F-27 in Lahore in 1971 as "a symbolic act to draw the world's attention to our intense feelings for an independent Jammu and Kashmir." Of the killings for which he was hanged, she said: "He may have killed in self-defence."



In Pakistan, Butt was being elevated to the status of a national hero. Widespread protests and angry student demonstrations were followed by readings of* namaz-e-janaza, *or funeral prayers, in almost all cities.



Zakira Butt (top) and an Islamabad magazine cover on the 1971 hijacking: glorification of Butt

Butt's elder son Javed, 22, who was arrested briefly for protesting outside the Indian Embassy in Islamabad, was equally forthright. "I have also pledged that I will continue the armed struggle my father fought for," he said. Javed's younger brother Shaukat, 18, said Butt's letters to them were unrepentant, "always words of courage". Evidently, when he infiltrated a second time into India in 1976, he told his family that he was off to Karachi to see a daughter.

Butt's hanging was widely perceived as an act of vengeance for Mhatre's assassination, and the Pakistani media took the offensive very quickly. *The Pakistan Times* editorially sought to give Butt's murders a political colour. It said: "Individuals driven by what they think are righteous causes often commit excesses. But authority has to act (with) much more responsibility." The daily, which reflects government views, warned that Pakistan had better get prepared for "another slanging match with New Delhi over the allegations of complicity which will certainly follow" Mhatre's murder. *The Muslim* of Islamabad, a more independent daily, headlined its coverage of the Pakistani reaction as "Wave of grief, anger sweeps nation" and gave detailed reports from cities of processions and demonstrations.

In conversation, Butt's associates in Pakistan declined to draw any connection between the terrorist Kashmir Liberation Army and their JKLF of which Butt was a protagonist most of his life. "We don't know who this liberation army is," said Farooque Haider, a Rawalpindi doctor who was a close associate of Butt. Chairman of the JKLF Finance Committee, Haider alleged that it was commonly believed that "the Mhatre murder had been deliberately organised by the Indians themselves to discredit the front."

If all this was far-fetched, it was also clear that Kashmir touches a sensitive chord in Pakistan. And it was an ominous outcome that one terrorist action has done more to bring that problem back into the front pages than all the debates and publicity engineered by Pakistan over the years.

—SUNIL SETHI in Peshawar

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DIPLOMACY

Servants or Spies?

ONE OF the more congenial exchanges between India and Pakistan was the sponsoring last fortnight of a seminar by a young Islamabad newspaper, *The Muslim*, that brought together journalists, political and military experts to initiate a lively debate. It was, however, debatable how many of the seminar's participants were able to express their discomfiture against the unfolding gory drama of the Mhatre assassination and the Butt execution.

It is even more uncertain how many of the distinguished participants bothered to delve into the details of the strange goings-on at the Indian Embassy in Islamabad, the city in which the seminar was held. If truth be told, 1984 hasn't started on an auspicious note for Indo-Pakistan relations, whatever the conclusions of the ivory tower debate. The episode of the missing Indian servants followed by the expulsion of two Indian Airlines (IA) officials, Naresh Chand and Janak Raj Gupta, followed in turn by the retaliatory exit of two New Delhi-based Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) officers still raises a chill wind in the Pakistani capital, already in the throes of an unprecedented cold wave.

Though the view from New Delhi may be sunnier—"Oh, just the usual shenanigans," said one Indian participant dismissively—Islamabad firmly believes that the two domestics found missing by the mother of Arun Parshad (counsellor at the Indian Embassy) on the morning of January 2, weren't servants at all. They were, according to popular reports here, carefully planted Indian intelligence men crudely got rid off. To make matters worse, their employer Parshad, an affable pipe-smoking man, isn't a conventional career diplomat at all—a former police officer, he was on deputation to an Indian intelligence agency before arriving in Islamabad 14 months ago.

To complicate matters further, the disappearance of the Indian servants is being connected with a happening infinitely more sinister. A day later, sections of the Pakistani media reported a major arms and gold haul in Lahore in which it was said that a Pakistani army officer was killed and another injured. Though news of the arms haul was later flashed on national television, what was not reported was the rounding up of a large number of lower- and middle-level Pakistani army officers from Lahore, Rawalpindi and Peshawar cantonments.

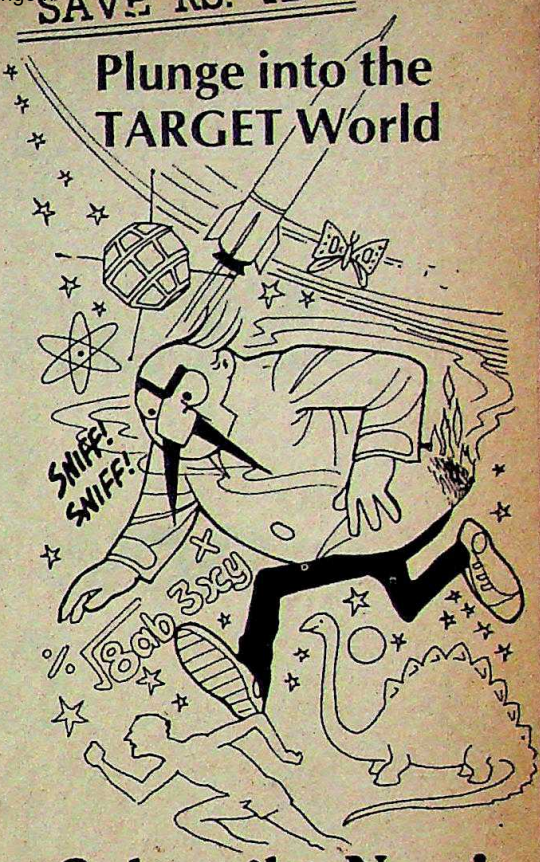
In a country where the media is restricted, news travels swiftly and subtly and is easily misconstrued precisely because of the restrictions. The question most widely being asked in Pakistan's cities is: did the disappearance of the Indian servants have any connection with what was reportedly the very early stage of a coup to overthrow President Zia-ul-Haq organised by a group of younger officers? The two events may be entirely coincidental. But even the case of the missing servants has caused enough of a stink between Indian Embassy officials and the Pakistan Foreign Office with the propaganda machinery of both operating full blast. According to the Pakistanis, they have adequate information from their security agencies to believe that the two servants were Indian securitymen, "put across the border" with the aid of the two Lahore-based IA officials who were later expelled. According to the Indians, the two servants were only long-suffering domestics nabbed by Pakistani security intent on "squeezing" some informa-



Chand and Gupta, the expelled Indian Airlines officials, on arrival in New Delhi

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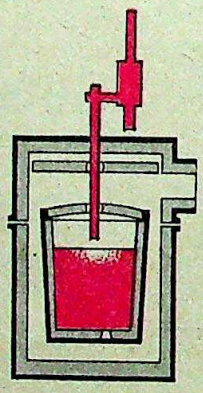
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The Children's Magazine

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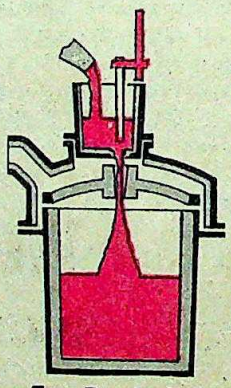
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Secondary steelmaking technology

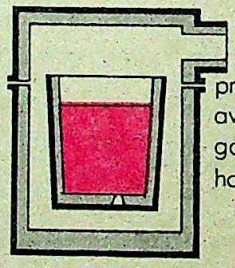
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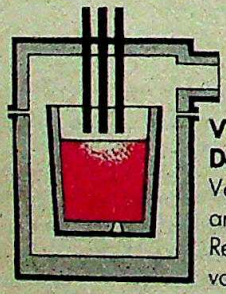
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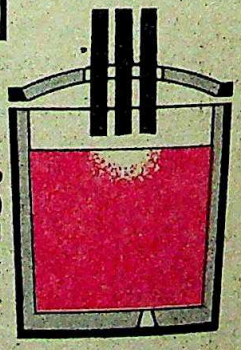
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...ow and were quietly "put across the border" ...after their purpose had been served.

It is ironic that, in the ceaseless diplo...matic bickering that has ensued since, both ...sides are even employing the same phrases. ...But the facts of the case remain that from Ja...nuary 2 till they popped up in New Delhi on ...January 19 when a spokesman of the Mini...stry of External Affairs issued a statement ...saying "we are relieved that the servants ...have arrived here safely," nothing was ...known of their whereabouts. How they spent ...the intervening 17 days, how they crossed the ...distance of 400 km between Islamabad and ...Lahore, and whether they were consorting ...with security officers of Pakistani intelli...gence or station managers of Indian Airlines, ...remains a mystery. What is also unclear is ...how they were "put across the border" as ...diplomats on both sides put it. According to ...the Pakistanis, they were first given sanctua...ry by the IA officials in Lahore and then put ...on an IA flight which they boarded, no doubt, ...when the officials bribed certain officers in ...Pakistani immigration at Lahore airport. ...According to the Indians, they were simply ...dropped across the land border when Pa...kistan intelligence had had enough of ...them—"after all," says an Indian Embassy ...official, "it is a long border and they could have been put across anywhere".

Still, there are some other clues in the mystery that may help piece the missing bits of the jigsaw. Chief among them:

- that the two servants, Virendra Thakur and K.K. Gupta, arrived to work for Parshad respectively two months and one month prior to their disappearance;
- that they disappeared without their bedding and their passports but with their small suitcases of clothes; and
- that in protest of their disappearance, the Indian Ambassador in Islamabad, K.D. Sharma, protested not only to the Foreign Office but unusually to Lt-General K.M. Arif, chief of staff to President Zia-ul-Haq.

All these points raise some basic questions. Was it a coincidence that two newly arrived servants should take off so mysteriously? What kind of information did they possess during their brief stay to become prime targets for a kidnapping? If they were kidnapped, how did they manage to take their suitcases along? And was the Indian ambassador perhaps protesting too much when he took up the case personally with the President's closest military aide, having already lodged a complaint with the police and the Foreign Office.

The net result of the servants' even more mysterious arrival in New Delhi was that the Pakistan Foreign Office took serious objection, calling their exit illegal under the terms of the Geneva Convention. Further, it communicated to the Indian Embassy that the servants be brought back to Pakistan to face trial for breaking a law. The Indian Embassy on its part contested these charges and said "we have conclusive evidence that they were put across the border with the connivance of Pakistan's intelligence agencies". And to "close the file" as one Indian official put it, the Pakistan Government retaliated on February 2 by asking for the repatriation of the two IA officials. Five days later, the Indian Government in turn sent two PIA officials packing home.

While the Pakistani media has gone to town reporting the incidents, and both the Pakistan Foreign Office and Indian Embassy are prolonging their pique, the shenanigans have left diplomatic observers in Islamabad generally bemused. One of them says: "What do you expect from Indo-Pak relations with these day-to-day thrillers in progress?" As for larger issues like regional cooperation among South Asian neighbours, such subjects always remain prime draws at seminars in the cause of promoting peace and friendship.

—SUNIL SETHI in Islamabad



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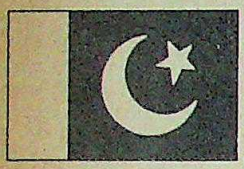
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PAKISTAN

Breaking New Ground



RETIRED air marshal Zulfikar Ali Khan was Pakistan's air force chief for a portion of the 1970s. One evening in the second week of February he sat before the microphone in the largest, jam-packed conference hall of the Holiday Inn hotel facing the cream of the Pakistani elite. Each sentence coming out of his thinly set lips drew bursts of applause. "The applause of a single human being is of great consequence," wrote Dr Johnson. The applause of 300 Pakistani scholars, journalists, geopolitical and defence studies specialists and others was a turning point in the foreign policy thinking of the Pakistani elite outside the military-bureaucratic complex that governs the country.

"The 3 million Afghan refugees on our soil is the biggest problem that faces Pakistan in this decade," declared Zulfikar Ali Khan. "Pakistanis have been fed on myths and mistaken concepts. The Soviet Union does not need the 'warm waters' of Pakistan for access to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, even if tzarist Russia did in the 19th century. The Soviet Union does not face an Islamic threat. In any case, the key to the return of the Afghan refugees to Afghanistan does not lie in American hands. It is in the firm grip of the Soviet Union. The presence of this huge number of refugees is creating all kinds of socio-economic pressures on Pakistan. The pressures will aggravate if we cannot resolve the Afghan crisis soon. We must go to the Soviets in search of a settlement. We have to talk to the Soviets. We have to persuade them to gradually withdraw their troops and broadbase the Kabul regime and help us repatriate the refugees."

To loud cheers from the audience, he continued: "It was a grave mistake on our part to allow armed refugees to encamp in Pakistan. Which other country has permitted millions of armed refugees from another country into its own territory? If the Afghans are fighting for the freedom of their fatherland, they should fight from within their country. The Algerians fought the French for nine years, but they did not cross over to neighbouring Morocco or Tunisia. Did the Vietnamese take refuge in China or Burma to fight the Americans? Nothing we have done so far to resolve the Afghan crisis has met with success. The challenge we face is no easy thing. We must sit down to think new solutions."

The suave, scholarly retired air marshal is not close to the regime of General Zia-ul-Haq. In private conversation after the speech, he made it clear that he spoke only on his own behalf, for no one else. Officials attending the seminar sought to play down the importance of the air marshal's statement. However, no one—from Foreign Minister Sahabzada Yakub Khan to officials of the External Affairs Ministry—tried to minimise the gravity of the refugee question.

The foreign office and the top brass of the military have been mulling over the refugee question since the autumn of 1983 when the UN-sponsored 'peace process' was blocked by the US Government. Pakistani officials do not concede an American blockade. They point to a hardening of the Soviet position, a retreat from an earlier commitment to withdrawal of troops within a given time frame. But Pakistani officials are deeply concerned about the "possibilities of 1984". Would President Reagan, in order to improve US relations with the Soviet Union, abandon his cold war stance on Afghanistan?

Pakistanis of all political hues realise that the Americans will not push the Soviet troops out of Afghanistan. The Government takes a dim view of those in, or close to, the Reagan Administration who have been urging an escalation of the fighting in Afghanistan. This would inevitably mean another avalanche of armed refugees into Pakistan. No one in Pakistan believes that the mujahedin can ever drive the Russians out. "It's a grim prospect for Pakistan," mused an official. "We have to do a lot of new thinking."

That, too, is not easy for the military regime. General Zia has proved himself to be an astute diplomat since the Soviet lurch into Afghanistan, getting a lot of political and diplomatic mileage from that traumatic event. He seems to realise that he can get no more mileage from the Soviet military presence.

Some weeks ago, at a confidential meeting with select editors of Pakistani newspapers, General Zia disclosed that the US Government had "offered Pakistan a security guarantee and the stationing of Pershing-II missiles on our soil if we need them for our defence. But I rejected these offers and made it very clear to the US Government that we shall give no bases or facilities in the event of a contingency situation in the Persian Gulf or the Middle East."

Two of the editors invited for the briefing confirmed that General Zia was "trying to distance himself" from the American strategic designs for West and South-west Asia. In the course of a two-hour conversation with Indian participants in an Islamabad seminar on regional cooperation in South Asia, General Zia denied a report that had appeared in the London newspaper *Jung* saying that he had asked the US Government for a "security guarantee" to Pakistan. "It was a complete fabrication," he said.

He has even begun to look around for a direct approach to the Soviet Union without much success. Perhaps the most significant single development in Pakistan's foreign relations in the last two years is the improvement in its relations with the USSR. Not only have the Soviets signed a promising trade agreement with Pakistan, they have offered Pakistan across-the-board development assistance, particularly in such crucial areas as oil exploration, power generation and heavy and light industry.

Pakistanis are severely handicapped in interpreting and monitoring Soviet foreign policy and diplomatic activity...Pakistani officials have fed themselves on American perceptions and interpretation of Soviet foreign policy and diplomatic behaviour.

For the first time in 34 years, Pakistan has a Soviet ambassador who is visible to the public eye and is sought after by segments of the elite. Ambassador Smirnov, a polished middle-aged career diplomat who is fluent in Urdu—as are most of the diplomatic staff in the sizeable Soviet Embassy in Islamabad—has been lecturing at universities and research institutes concerned with strategic, defence and geopolitical issues. He gives interviews to Pakistani reporters.

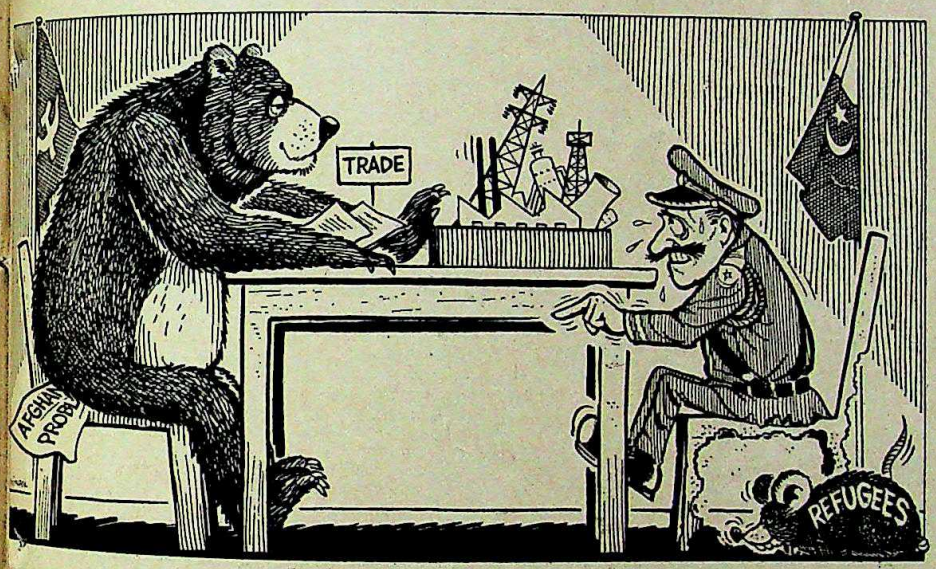
Smirnov is said to have developed a rapport with General Zia and Yakub Khan who speaks fluent Russian. General Zia would have gone duck shooting with Smirnov the day Yuri Andropov died. That diversionary engagement had to be put off, but General Zia spent an hour with Smirnov after sighing the condolence book at the Soviet Embassy. He had already announced his decision to go to Moscow to attend Andropov's funeral and was probably the non-communist world's first head of state to offer himself as an on the spot mourner. For two days there was hectic activity in the foreign office and the President's Secretariat to prepare briefs for a possible meeting between General Zia

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and the new Soviet leader, Konstantin Chernenko, or any other ranking member of the CPSU politburo.

AMBASSADOR Smirnov transmitted to the CPSU Central Committee Secretariat General Zia's request for a meeting with Chernenko. The Pakistan ambassador in Moscow sent out strong feelers. But not only did Chernenko or any other ranking member of the politburo not agree to meet either General Zia or Yakub Khan, Pakistan was conspicuously missing in the lists of countries released by Tass on the first



two days after Andropov's death as having sent condolences to the Kremlin. Pakistanis were baffled by this stunning coolness of Chernenko to Andropov who had a special meeting with Zia during the Brezhnev funeral in November 1982.

Pakistanis are severely handicapped in interpreting and monitoring Soviet foreign policy and diplomatic activity. There are no Soviet studies in any Pakistani university and hardly any attempt in the foreign office to develop specialisation in Soviet affairs. Individual scholars like Mehrunnissa Ali of Karachi University have done patches of objective studies of Soviet foreign policy, but they are nowhere near the centre of decision making.

Pakistani officials and analysts have fed themselves on American perceptions and interpretations of Soviet foreign policy and diplomatic behaviour. "We have never thought that the Soviets may have a positive policy for Pakistan, that they may not be interested in destabilising or balkanising Pakistan, and that they may be willing to coexist with an independent Pakistan once it detaches itself from the US frame of confrontation with the USSR," lamented a scholar at the Islamabad University. "The time has come for Pakistan to think anew about the Soviet Union. It is our neighbour, a fact that nobody can wish away. The United States, after all, is 10,000 miles away."

There are important men in the foreign office who echo these sentiments though in a somewhat muffled manner. However, among the non-governmental elite in the universities, newspaper offices and business circles, the feeling is widely shared, that the United States won't "allow" Pakistan to play a Soviet card beyond a certain limit.

Indeed, the Pakistani elites appear to be obsessed with two larger-than-life images: one of the United States and the other of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. In their perception, the American "friend" and the Indian "enemy" have joined together to reduce Pakistan to a political nonentity. A columnist in Lahore threw up his hands in despair while talking about Pakistan-American relations. "With a certain type of friend, you don't need an enemy," he quipped.

In the university campuses Pakistanis now candidly ask questions they would not have asked in the past. "Is America interested in its own global and regional interests or in the genuine well-being of the Pakistani people and the Pakistani nation?" asked a young lecturer in international relations. The regime-people dichotomy, deeper now then ever before, adds a sharp edge to this type of searching questions.

The MRD agitation of August-December did not succeed in wresting major concessions from General Zia, but it was not a failure either. It has shaken the military regime to its roots. It has polarised the feudal class in Sind from the rural-urban masses who have raised the flag of true federalism. The right of the smaller provinces to autonomy is now deeply imprinted on Pakistan's political psyche.

The Sind agitation has shaken the Punjabi elite out of their complacence. They are now in quest of a new equation between Punjab and the three smaller provinces, which alone can provide Pakistan with the foundation of a stable polity after the passing away of the military regime. No one in Pakistan knows when the military will quit governing; most people are more pessimistic in 1984 than they seemed to be in 1983 about genuine elections being held by General Zia. But they also know that the regime cannot endure for many more years.

Most Pakistanis are baffled by charges made by highly placed Indians of Pakistani war threats against India. A war with India is one thing no Pakistani wants. The regime just cannot think about it because of the Soviet military presence right across the northern border. General Zia and Yakub Khan realise that cries of a Pakistani threat have more to do with the coming Lok Sabha poll in India than the realities along the India-Pakistan border. But the 35-year-old industry of conflict, suspicion and hatred has spawned vast and strong vested interests in both countries, and General Zia is often under pressure from these interests in Pakistan to fuel the rhetorical bush fire.

There seems to be genuine fear in Pakistan that sparks of warlike rhetoric may lead to military engagements. A flourishing smuggling trade in arms and ammunition exists between Pakistan and India. Officials connive at it. Politicians patronise it.

In a two-hour wide-ranging conversation with Indian participants in the Islamabad seminar, General Zia made it categorically clear for the first time that Pakistan's no-war pact would apply to Kashmir and would not bypass the Simla Agreement. He said Pakistan fully subscribed to the Simla Agreement for which he complimented Prime Minister Indira Gandhi: "We do not accept the status quo in Kashmir, but we have pledged not to change it except by peaceful means. Our no-war pact proposal fully endorses this pledge." However, this important announcement was absent in the official version of the conversation intriguingly released in Islamabad.

In the first quarter of 1984, Pakistan appears to be a nation in multiple binds. It is strapped in an Afghan bind, an Indian bind, a Soviet bind and an American bind. And there is, above all, the bind of political deadlock that gnaws at the vitals of an entire nation. The petrifaction of the internal political process pathetically chimes with the petrifaction of Pakistan's relations with its three neighbours as well as Washington. The primary task of the regime is to loosen the binds in Pakistan's foreign relations if the country is not to get engulfed in a civil war of unimaginable proportions. The primary task of the people of Pakistan is to loosen the political bind.

—BHABANI SEN GUPTA

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SOVIET UNION

Status Quo Ante

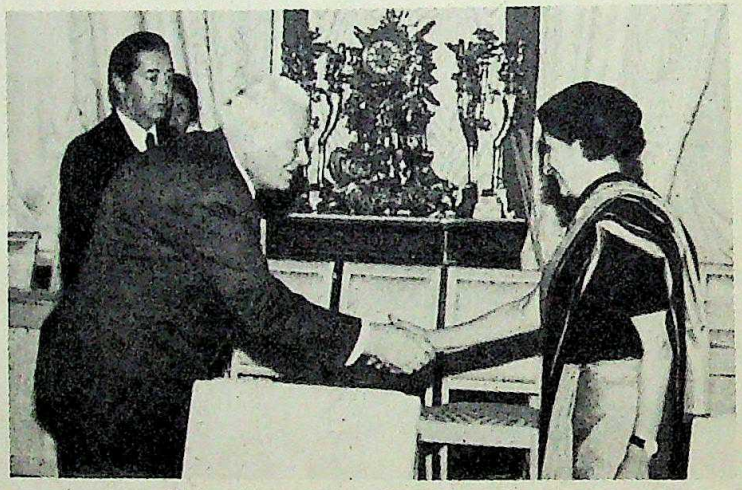


THE PROVERBS of Solomon in the Bible lists four things as always wonderful: the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea and the way of a man with a maid. Solomon might have added a fifth if he were a character of our times: the way of the Soviet Union in choosing its leader. The CPSU politburo and central committee still has the bad habit of baffling and surprising the vast array of Kremlinologists in the western countries. The foremost specialist on ranking personnel in the CPSU is Jerry F. Hough of Duke University. Three months before the death of Yuri Andropov, Hough wrote authoritatively: "... if Andropov were to die in the next few months, there would be only two candidates: Mikhail Gorbachev and Grigoriy Romanov. In reality, in my opinion, there would only be one candidate. If I were a betting man, I would say that Gorbachev has a 90 per cent chance of selection (I would give 10 per cent of the 90 to Grishin as a front man for Gorbachev), Romanov 8 per cent, and someone from the rest of the field 2 per cent." Jerry Hough would have lost the bet miserably.

Even in the last days of January it was clear that Andropov's days were coming to an end. The CPSU central committee and politburo had enough time to resolve the succession issue by consensus and agreement. The man chosen, 72-year-old Konstantin Chernenko, disappointed most people outside the USSR. Chernenko was seen as a strong contender for the highest political office in the USSR when Brezhnev died. He was, however, allowed to slowly fade away from the scan of Soviet specialists when Andropov became the general secretary. Little did any one expect Chernenko to be given the highest office at the death of his "arch rival" Yuri Andropov.

Five successions have taken place since the birth of the Soviet state; certain ground rules have now been evolved. Consensus and unanimity is the basic principle, but a consensus may not always be easily or smoothly forthcoming. There are large, well-entrenched interest groups in the USSR, and these often realign to influence the choice of the leader of the CPSU. It is only natural that there should be more than one contender. Personal likes and dislikes and clash of interests and policies play their own part to activate the succession process. Finally, however, if the politburo can come to a consensus, the central committee, the ultimate arbiter, approves the choice. This is what happened in the case of Chernenko.

The average age of members of the politburo is 69. Five of the 12 who constitute the highest group in the CPSU are 75 or above. Among them are the Prime Minister Tikhonov, first Deputy Prime Minister Arkhipov Gromyko, and the Defence Minister Ustinov. Five members are "young", that is below 65, and only one is truly young—Gorbachev, who is only 51. One half of the central committee members are in their '50s. The vast majority of the Soviet personnel who run the apparatus of the Soviet state as well as the CPSU, including the regional party secretaries and the obkom first secretaries, now belong to the generation born in the late 1930s or early 1940s.



Chernenko and Mrs Gandhi: strong ties

It is part of the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism that a revolutionary never retires. He or she must die in harness. In the Soviet Union, as in other countries, not only do elderly people die, younger people also meet with death. Frol Kozlov, a politburo member, had a crippling stroke at 55, while Fedor Kulakov died at 60. Andropov was 68 when he succeeded Brezhnev. In his 13 months in power he was in the sick-bed for at least six.

There is no evidence whatsoever that younger elements in the CPSU hierarchy are impatient to seize power or contemptuous of the oldies hanging on to seats of power.

Chernenko was chosen because he had many years' experience of running the huge party apparatus, and because he was a bridge between the younger elements in the central committee and politburo and the elderly group. Gorbachev had been promoted to the full membership of the politburo only in 1981; he is clearly short of the minimum experience the CPSU general secretary must possess.

It is more than likely that Chernenko's term will end in the next three years. He may well turn out to be the first general secretary to voluntarily retire from office when he reaches the age of 75. The next choice, in all probability, will be Gorbachev. Already, the younger troika—Gorbachev, Aliyev and Romanov—have, between themselves, the charge of the entire Soviet economy and much of the party and state administration.

In the Soviet official articulations of the first three weeks after Andropov's death, the general directions of domestic and foreign policies were clearly laid out. Chernenko will be ready to improve relations with the United States, but not on Ronald Reagan's terms. He will not help Reagan win the November election. He will probably give a high priority to improving relations with China, something Andropov wished to, but could not because of illness. Chernenko will certainly do everything he can to [illegible] Western Europe's growing discontent with United States.

The cavalier way in which Chernenko treated Pakistan's Zia-ul-Haq in Moscow during Andropov's funeral signals two messages about Afghanistan, both dismal for Islamabad. Chernenko will not relent on Afghanistan to please Reagan and Zia-ul-Haq. He does not believe that Zia-ul-Haq can act on the Afghan issue outside the frame of American policy.

For India, Chernenko means miles and miles of more Soviet friendship. Two Indian leaders know him well. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi met with him many times as Brezhnev's principal aide. The CPI leader Rajeswara Rao, met him a number of times when Chernenko was in charge of dealing with foreign communist parties. Chernenko will probably not even try to bring the CPI and Mrs Gandhi together. But in his 30-minute cordial meeting with the prime minister, Chernenko conveyed to Mrs Gandhi that message Marshal Ustinov would have brought her from the politburo on February 6: the Soviet Union will firmly and unequivocally stand by India if India felt it was in trouble" caused either by the US rearming of Pakistan or US transfer of high nuclear technology to communist China.

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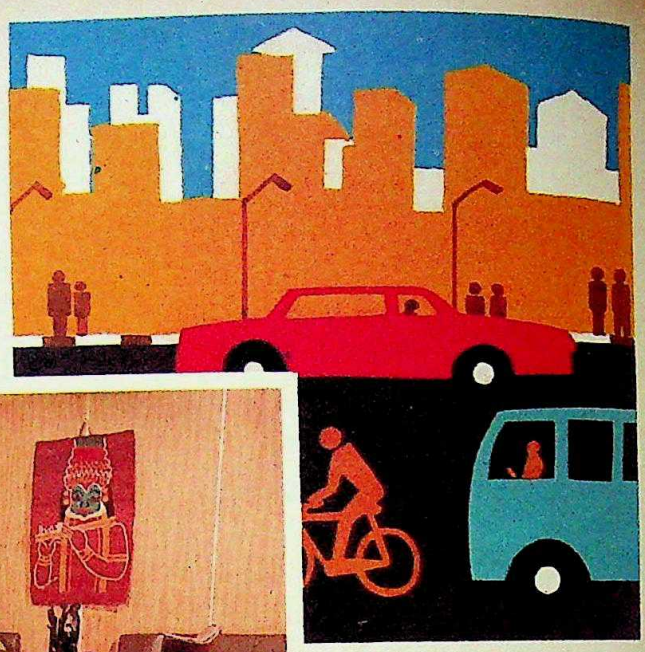
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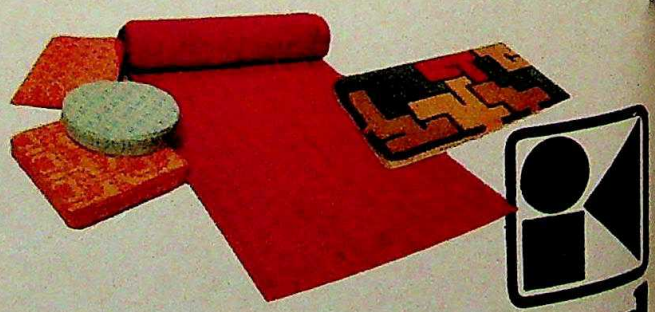
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AFFORESTATION DRIVE

WITH wood becoming increasingly scarce for industrial users, an increasing number of companies are stepping into the field of afforestation. Match manufacturers Wimco, for instance, are planning to enter the business in north India, in collaboration with the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). The latter will provide finance to farmers in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh who wish to switch from agricultural crops to the growing of poplars—which will cost Rs 150 per tree. In return, Wimco has guaranteed a return of Rs 500 per tree, plus specialised technical and extension services. In the initial stages some 20,000 hectares are expected to come under poplar plantation.

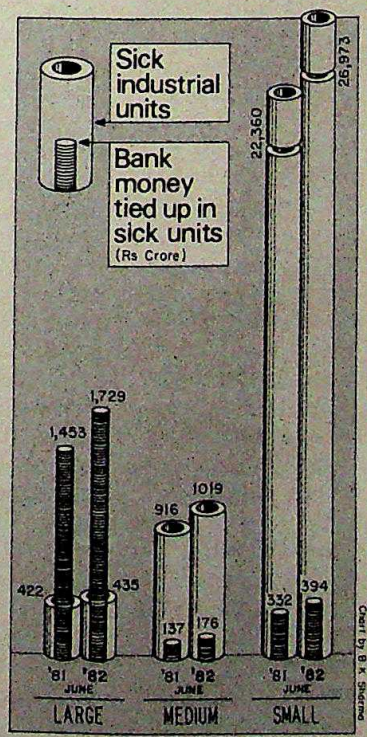
Meanwhile, other industrialists too are talking to NABARD for launching similar schemes. Among them is Aditya Birla, whose Gwalior Rayon is currently locked in a bitter dispute with the Kerala Government over the supply and price of wood for its pulp-making plant at Mavoor. Yet another Birla concern, Harihar Polyfibres in Karnataka, had hoped to tie up an arrangement with the state Government for leasing out forest land, but is yet to get final approval.

SOLVING SQUABBLES

THE FEDERATION of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry's (FICCI) year-long squabble over membership is finally nearing a solution. A FICCI committee comprising leading lights of the organisation is now close to a final settlement that will, barring last minute snags, bring an end to the sponsored membership drives that were aimed at building up vote banks for leading industrialists to ensure their success in FICCI elections. The year 1982-83 had as a result of this seen FICCI's membership rise from 850 to 1,450 in just one year, and by the end of last December a further 150 membership applications were awaiting consideration. Many of these may now be withdrawn by the leading industrialists who had sponsored them, and even some existing memberships in FICCI may be cancelled or withdrawn as a part of the overall settlement. The effort is to preserve a minimum standard for FICCI memberships to finally put to an end the mustering of vote banks, and to have FICCI's annual elections fought on the basis of genuine memberships. As an ad hoc measure pending a final settlement, this year's elections, due in April, will be held on the basis of memberships existing last year.

INDUSTRIAL SICKNESS

SICK industrial units are locking up increasing proportions of bank loans. Reserve Bank of India (RBI) figures, available only up to June 1982, show that Rs 2,299 crore were locked up in large, medium and small sick units, up by 20 per cent from Rs 1,922 crore a year earlier. In all, 435 large, 1,019 medium and 25,342 small units were on the sick list. While the vast majority of the large units are still considered viable, over half the small-scale sick units have been declared non-viable. Case study teams have found after a recent study that 58 per cent of the large units fall sick because of management failures, a further 10 to 15 per cent because of initial faulty planning, and yet another 10 per cent because of marketing problems.



TATA'S TAKEOVER BID

THE TATA Iron and Steel Company (TISCO) has like some other Tata companies, been on an expansion drive now for more than a year including through corporate takeover. The company is now making a bid for Special Steels, currently managed by Shapoorji Pallonji. Special Steels is deeply in the red with losses of around Rs 4 crore. But the Tatas, who have been moving into a series of steel and engineering companies in recent months (a ball bearing unit from Metal Box, an engineering unit from Davy Ashmore, and management control of Kumardhubi Engineering Works), clearly feel that they can do better with Special Steels. The details of the deal are still being worked out and Tata spokesmen say they are unable to comment on the subject immediately. But the deal is expected to be finalised before the end of the financial year.

DIVERTING DEBTS

THE GOVERNMENT has started putting mild pressure on private industry to control its commercial and even quasi-commercial borrowings in foreign exchange, asking businessmen to go instead to the public sector Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India (ICICI) which has some spare lines of foreign exchange credit. The heads of some engineering companies also assert that even proposals to apply for loans to the International Finance Corporation (IFC), an affiliate of the World Bank which opened a full-fledged office in New Delhi last year, are being deflected in some cases to the ICICI, although IFC spokesmen say that no loan proposals that have reached the organisation have fallen through on this count. Clearly, however, the Government is concerned about too much foreign debt being acquired on relatively expensive terms, and the effort is to assert greater official control on this front.

TURNING THE TABLES

TRADE union activity and collective bargaining have now spread to private sector executives. The Bombay-based R.J. Mehta's Free Trade Unions of India (FTUI) has floated the Engineering, Technicians and Officers Association, registered it under the Trade Unions Act, and attracted members from such companies as Killick Nixon, including senior officials who would in the normal course represent the company in its negotiations with workmen. The new association has also tied up with the existing Officers Association of the Cable Corporation of India which had been helped in the past by Mehta. The association has also negotiated on behalf of officers in a third company for certain benefits.

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INDUSTRIAL CLIMATE

Subtle Shifts



I WONDER if finance ministers can spare time for newspapers when they are busy with their budgets. I do not refer to the killings in Punjab or bus accidents in Karnataka that are taking so much space in our papers these days, but the rash of industrial advertisements which crowd out news on the back pages of most leading dailies. The number of people who are interested in setting up new industries—worth anything from Rs 50 lakh to Rs 5 crore—seems to be growing, along with, surprisingly, the number of those who have sick units on their hands and want to get rid of them. I counted more than 40 such announcements in just one newspaper last month and it covered mainly north India. I have a feeling that at any given time, probably as many as 200 medium and large sick units are available in the market and there are almost certainly as many entrepreneurs looking for new ideas or projects. This is a fairly large number for a country like India where old industries, like old cars, are carefully nursed before they are finally discarded, and the number is growing.

Recession is one reason why the number is growing though I doubt whether that is the only one. Why is there such keen interest in new industries if there is a recession in demand? I suspect that what is happening is what the economists describe as "structural change", a change brought about by technological innovations, the decline of old "smokestack" industries and shifts in foreign trade. Old industries are dying, yielding place to new but the transformation is so subtle that we hardly notice it.

The country has just completed a third of a century of uninterrupted industrial growth—the Industries (Development & Regulation) Act of 1951 is exactly 33 years old this month—leaving behind a vast bulk of old "smokestack" industries that have somehow lost their shine. There are the so-called "sunset" industries that are being replaced or ought to be replaced by "sunrise" industries. This kind of structural adjustment is taking place all over the world, particularly so in the US, where industries are not as protected as they are here, but it would be wrong to assume that we are somehow immune to the phenomenon just because we do nothing about it.

Industrial change may be subtle but it is quite marked over a period. Thirty years ago, West Bengal was our No. 1 industrial state; it is no more so. There is a definite geographical shift in industrial concentration, from the east to the west, and also from the west to the south through the Vindhyas. The Calcutta-Asansol region is now reduced to an industrial backwater. It has been replaced by a long ribbon that stretches from Ahmedabad to Bangalore through Baroda, Bombay and Pune, admittedly with large no-industry patches in between, but the patches are filling up very rapidly, nearly as rapidly as industry after industry turns sick in and around Calcutta. The old British business houses like Martin Burn, Andrew Yule, Bird-Heilger, Braithwaites are ghosts of their former selves and some of them exist only on paper.

Indian Aluminium, one of the first companies to produce aluminium in India, made a loss this year, its first in 30 years. The company might go sick unless the Government rushes to the aid of the ailing aluminium industry, though Hindustan Aluminium, a Birla company, is not doing too badly. The proposal for the merger of Indian Aluminium with Mahindra & Mahindra, a firm that did not exist when Indian Aluminium turned out its first ingot, was vetoed by the Government last month. The centre of operations of a large number of Calcutta-based business houses, including Birla and Goenka, shifted long ago to Bombay and other places.

While preparing his budget, the finance minister must take a long-term view of the economy and not think only in terms of immediate gains and losses.

The second major shift is from "sunset" to "sunrise" industries. Steel is definitely a sunset industry all over the world though not yet in India where it is kept alive through regular injections of price hikes. Steel Authority of India (SAIL) is losing money at the rate of Rs 1 crore a day and would definitely go sick but for continuous price increases which make Indian steel among the most expensive in the world. The coal industry is also sick, despite large-scale modernisation. Coal and steel were at one time at the very core of our core sector but they too are slowly falling apart. The same is the case with the cotton textile industry. Thirty years ago, it was the country's largest and perhaps the most prosperous industry, but no more.

Most big textile groups have diversified over the years into other lines and textiles now forms only a small part of their activities. Delhi Cloth Mills have gone on to computers and automotive vehicles. Most textile mills of the Birla group have diversified into cement and so has the Singhania group. Non-textile companies have also shed or are beginning to shed their old traditional lines of business. Hindustan Lever is getting rid of its vanaspati business and going into chemicals. Chowgule has gone from iron ore into cement. There is constant churning up in technologies within the industrial world, both in the private and public sectors. Who would have believed that a company like HMT would march from machine tools to watches?

The third shift, though not as marked as the previous two, is from public to private sector, or rather a renewed emphasis on the private sector. This may sound strange, considering the growing pressures on the private sector to fall in line or else, but there is no doubt that the days of the public sector as a major agent of economic and social change are over. The Government still throws its weight about, as in the case of Escorts vs financial institutions, but it does so through its financial and administrative leverage and through leadership in industrial and technological innovation.

Of the large number of new products that have come onto the market during the last decade, no more than a handful have probably come from the public sector end. The pronounced shift against the public sector is partly a reaction against the rapid expansion in government activities in recent years and seems to be a world-wide phenomenon. In Britain, shares of nationalised industries are actually being sold on the stock exchange. The private sector in India has certainly proved to be more dynamic than the public sector, more enterprising, and consequently more profitable. It is also growing faster than the jaded public sector, which is undoubtedly one reason why the Government is so keen to subdue it.

The fourth shift is what Murray L. Weidenbaum, who headed President Reagan's council of economic advisers in 1981, has called the growth in communal perspective, from essentially domestic national concerns to world-wide multinational dimensions. We are now, as a country, more conscious of the world around us than we were, say, 20 years ago, and also, in a way, more responsive to changes in international economic and business climate. We are still not sure how to react to these changes, for the economy is

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still largely protected and the proportion of foreign trade and investment is not as large as in the case of other countries, though it is growing. More businessmen are now in touch with foreign markets than ever before and more companies are trying to raise loans and other funds from foreign banks than, say, 10 years ago. We are also importing technology in a big way, and from sources as far apart as Taiwan and Canada, and tend to view multinationals with less suspicion than before. It is to be seen, however, whether this openness has come to stay or is a temporary phase most countries pass through.

THE FIFTH shift is away from planning, particularly the bureaucratised form of planning that has come to be accepted as the only form of planning possible in a developing country. The Planning Commission today enjoys none of the prestige or authority it once did for people are now inclined to judge planning, as everything else, by results rather than its advertised virtues. The disillusionment with planning stems partly from the disillusionment with the Government as an agent of social change but it is now slowly turning into aversion. It is only a matter of time before the abolition of Planning Commission forms a plank in the economic platform of a political party. In a recent interview with a Delhi-based magazine, Charan Singh has said that the Planning Commission serves no purpose and he would not mind if it was done away with. He has also said that the public sector is a great squanderer of resources and should be handed over, bit by bit, to the private sector.

These trends are now so well established that no government can afford to ignore them. Take the first shift, viz, the geographical shift in industrial concentration. The Marxists in Bengal may blame the Centre for what amounts virtually to de-industrialisation of the state and the blame may be farfetched but the fact remains that the industrial growth rate there is extremely slow to the point of being negative. There are several reasons why this is so—and the state Government cannot be totally absolved of the blame—but there is no doubt that the trend has to be reversed.

The second shift—from "sunset" to "sunrise" industries—has to be reinforced by making it easy for the former to die a painless death and by providing special incentives to the latter. The textile industry in Bombay is a good case in point. It was evident after the recent labour strike that most of the mills in the city were redundant and beyond redemption. Since the bulk of the labour in the mills came from the neighbouring areas of Konkan, it would have been more practical as well as socially desirable to promote new industries in those areas with a view of absorbing labour rendered surplus in Bombay. I do not think this has been done. Instead, the Government nationalised the mills and took over their management though there is no reason to believe that the Government can run them better than the old owners. The sick mills will continue to be sick and will also continue to employ labour at the cost of the taxpayer who will ultimately foot the bill, as he does already for the bulk of the public sector units that are currently in the red. This is not economics, it is charity.

The same goes for the steel and coal industries. It is obvious that the demand for steel is not picking up to the extent estimated by 'experts' and may indeed begin to level off after a few years. This is so because a tonne of steel goes farther today than it did 20 years ago, partly because of improvements in industrial design and partly because of the superior quality of steels, even mild steels, now being produced. Europe is burdened with 50 per cent overcapacity in steel but, for political reasons, the industry is being subsidised in order not to lay off people. It has cost those countries billions of dollars and the problem is nowhere nearer solution.

The Americans don't do this kind of thing and the US steel industry has been able to restructure itself with a great deal of more speed than the Europeans. Only Margaret Thatcher's Britain seems to be a solitary exception. British steel industry is still not out of the woods but it has been slimmed down to less than two-thirds of its capacity and will soon begin to pay its way. Some such surgical operation is overdue both in our steel mills as well as our collieries but no action is being taken because of political reasons. Ten or maybe five years from now, India will have an inefficient and sick steel industry on its hands, nearly as useless as our cotton textile industry today.

About the third trend—public vs private sector—the less said the better, for here politics reigns supreme. The decision as to whether a particular project should be allotted to the public sector or private is taken not on the grounds of economic efficiency but political expediency. The electronics industry is a case in point. This is obviously an industry of the future, a "sunrise" industry of the first order. It is almost totally dependent for know-how on foreign sources, and from private rather than government sources. Yet the private sector has been given only a minor role in its development. The net result is the widening gap between ourselves and the world, a gap that will prove ruinous in about 10 years time when we shall be dealing in first and second generation computers while the world at large will have advanced beyond fourth generation. The sun will have set before it has risen.

These may not be the kind of problems a finance minister thinks about when he is doing his calculations for the budget, but what is a budget for if we merely think in terms of surpluses and deficits and do not have a long-term perspective in view? Just as a country's population is changing all the time—babies at one end and old folk at the other, in proportions that change from one decade to another—the character of the industrial population is also changing, perhaps even more rapidly.

Too many old industries—old in terms of age as well as technology—are a burden rather an asset. Too many industries in one area and too few elsewhere can give rise to serious social and political problems that can ultimately harm the economy. Too many industries controlled by the Government—the political instincts of politicians are sharper than the economic ones—can also be dangerous. What we need is a prudent mix, a little bit this way and a little bit that way, in line with the overall shifts and trends that mark the industrial scene today.

The shifts I have described are worldwide trends—for industries are virtually the same everywhere—and only those countries (like Japan, for instance) that have gone along with them have been able to do better than manage to keep their heads above water. The rest have just gone under. We too have taken a plunge, from No. 10 to No. 25 in international industrial ranking in 20 years (INDIA TODAY, January 31, 1984) and are steadily going down. I don't see how we can retrieve our position as long as we don't even realise that we are heading for a fall.



RAGHU RAI

Finance Minister Mukherjee: climate for change

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ESCORTS

Boarding Party



The Escorts board at a meeting: desperate bid to retain control

There has always been a measure of trust between industrialists and institutions which now threatens to snap. For if the institutions can move to grab effective control of a well-run company like Escorts by packing its board, they could just as easily flex their muscles in the other companies.

LONDON-BASED industrialist Swraj Paul's audacious bid to grab control of two industrial giants, DCM and Escorts, has already made corporate history in many ways. Last fortnight, the unprecedented move by the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) to sack the majority of Escorts directors, and to replace them with its own nominees, marked a fresh development in this battle that could shake Indian industrialists as much as the Government's nationalisation of 14 banks in 1969. For not only did the LIC move mark a major development in the continuing battle for control of the two companies, it also brought to the forefront the enormous corporate power of the public sector financial institutions, which hold dominant chunks of shares in most of the country's big companies.

The LIC's move in Escorts was itself backed by a 30 per cent shareholding in the company, to which must be added a 23 per cent combined holding of the General Insurance Corporation (GIC) and the Unit Trust of India (UTI). All three made for a 53 per cent majority that meant the LIC move would go through at the shareholders' extraordinary general meeting that LIC had called for.

The only way that the company's embattled Chairman H.P. Nanda could stop this display of financial muscle was through court action. And he lost no time in rushing to Bombay a day later to implead LIC in his court case there in connection with what he saw as the Government's efforts to pressurise him into allowing Swraj Paul a foothold in Escorts.

At the time of writing, the Bombay High Court had yet to give its verdict on Nanda's writ petition. So it remained to be seen whether LIC's call for an extraordinary general meeting of Escorts shareholders in order to effect the change in the company's board would go through, or whether it would be blocked. Either way, further legal battles seemed in store even as Swraj Paul's younger brother, Surrendra Paul, predicted that the entire matter would be over by the end of March, when he expected the Escorts board to be changed and, in further follow-up action, for the new board to register Swraj Paul's share purchases and to withdraw the court case filed by the company. The chairman of one of the financial institutions indicated, likewise, that once the new board was in place, it would register those of Paul's share purchases where legality was not in question, and then withdraw the Bombay court case.

It was impossible to predict whether things would move as smoothly as this, and attention at the moment was focused on the factors that could have prompted LIC to take its unprecedented step. But the comments of the institutions' chairmen and managing directors revealed a hopeless confusion about both facts and intentions in the Escorts case. One spokesman denied that the LIC move to change the company's board had anything to

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...ly with the Government; but another said the Government had been consulted. One said the matter had not been discussed at the monthly meeting of the inter-institutional committee (which is designed to coordinate the actions of the different institutions), but another said there had been consultations among the institutions. One spokesman said no thought had been given to what the new Escorts board would do, once it was in place, but another said it might register some of Paul's shares, and a third said that the share registration question was a legal one and had nothing to do with the move to change the board.

Finally, while one institutional spokesman argued that changing the majority of directors on a board did not mean changing the management, another argued that it did. Clearly, these men, backed by enormous financial power, were speaking at cross-purposes and had no clearly thought out positions on most of the issues raised, indicating opportunism if not arbitrariness.

The most coherent explanation of the LIC move came from the chairman of one of the financial institutions, who displayed considerable irritation with some of Nanda's recent actions, and took strong objection to a series of decisions by the Escorts board.

He listed Nanda's refusal to straightaway take a nominee of the Unit Trust of India on the Escorts board, his decision to file a court case against the Government, the Reserve Bank and Swraj Paul without consulting the institutions beforehand, his proposal to issue Rs 35 crore worth of shares and debentures in a manner designed to reduce the institution's shareholding in the company—once again, without consulting the institutions beforehand—and his insistence on pre-paying loans taken from the institutions even when the institutions were not keen on accepting pre-payment.

"In other companies, they have the courtesy to consult us beforehand even on such matters as the declaration of a dividend, but here we are not consulted on a large share issue. And on one issue after another our representative on the Escorts board has been overruled although we are the majority shareholders," he pointed out. "When the board of a company indulges in a series of provocations of the nature, we are entitled to take the action that we see fit," he added.

Escorts spokesmen list their defences against these charges, arguing that the company's board took or ratified all the decisions being referred to, and that the company could not therefore be faulted for what it had done. But even if the charge of provocation has some merit, the LIC's response was equivalent to slitting somebody's throat because he had spoken out of turn.

For one thing, numerous other companies have indulged in similar or greater provocations, but these have never resulted in the kind of punitive action taken against Escorts. M.R.B. Punja, chairman of the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI), himself recalls that Premier Automobiles did not consult the company's board, of which he was a member, before raising the company's car prices. All that Punja did was register a note of protest. And in reply to a question, LIC's newly appointed Managing Director S.G. Subrahmanyan admitted that there was no precedent to the move regarding Escorts. That was seconded by LIC's senior managing director, A.S. Gupta, who said: "Normally we have only one nominee on a company's board."

In contrast, Escorts' move to reduce the institutions' holding in the company is not without precedent, although an institutional spokesman claimed it was. For instance, Reliance Textile Industries, in its fourth series of debentures, handled the matter in a way as to reduce institutional holdings in the company—and the institutions did not object.

IF the institutions could not give a coherent explanation for their action, one unspoken question suggested itself: could orders to move have come from the one person who controls all the financial institutions, Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee? After all, it is Mukherjee who first announced the investment incentives that encouraged Swraj Paul to invest, then defended the incentives in the face of a rising crescendo of criticism, overruled the Reserve Bank's objections regarding the eligibility of Paul's investments, and finally issued a "clarification" that sought to clear the legal doubts regarding the share purchases.

If he was on the side of Paul, and if it was indeed he who had prompted the institutions to move against Escorts, then the real significance of the institutions' power over companies stood revealed: for the institutions are all owned by the Government, they act in concert, and even a telephone call to them from Delhi can change the course of a company's future.

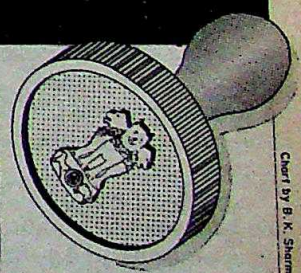
That is a frightening thought because the institutions—LIC, GIC, UTI, plus the Industrial Finance Corporation of India, and Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India—now control between 30 and 75 per cent of the shares in 10 of the 25 largest private sector companies in the country (ranked by assets), and hundreds of others down the line, a list that includes such corporate giants as Tata Iron and Steel, Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company, Hindustan Brown Boveri, Mahindra & Mahindra, Zenith Steel Pipes, Straw Products and numerous others.

The LIC alone has invested Rs 728 crore in the shares of private sector companies and in scores of them it is the single largest shareholder. Some other institutions have even greater clout: the IDBI has, by using the clause in loan agreements that enables appointment of directors and conversion of a part of the loan into shares, appointed its nominees on the boards of no fewer than 760 companies, involving loans of Rs 1,861 crore. And according to one private estimate, the institutions together have contributed no less than 32 per cent of the total cost of private sector projects during the decade of the 1970s. The total funds given by them to private industry now total a staggering Rs 14,900 crore, which is now reflected in the share ownerships and directorships in companies.

Many industrialists have not in the past been overly worried by this power, enormous as it is, chiefly because the institutional nominees on company boards have not in

INSTITUTIONAL POWER OVER COMPANIES

	A	B	C
TISCO	1	650	42
TELCO	2	605	45
ACC	5	241	44
ASHOK LEYLAND	7	236	28
SCINDIA STEAM	8	226	35
DCM	14	181	43
GUJARAT FERTILISERS	15	179	74
TATA POWER	20	153	38
LARSEN & TOUBRO	24	142	35
VOLTAS	25	128	46
MAHINDRA & MAHINDRA	26	127	43
ESCORTS	35	105	53
BOMBAY SUB. ELEC. SUPPLY	39	101	75
KESORAM IND.	70	63	39
KIRLOSKAR OIL	81	57	31



A RANK IN TOP 100 COMPANIES

B TOTAL ASSETS (Rs Crore)

C % SHARES HELD BY INSTITUTIONS

Source: Business Standard & S. K. Goyal

Chart by B. K. Sharma

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most cases come in the way of what the managements have wanted to do. This has often been a point of criticism by socialist commentators, but there has always been a measure of trust between industrialists and institutions which now threatens to snap. For if the institutions can move to grab effective control of a well-run company like Escorts by packing its board, they could just as easily flex their muscles in the other companies as well.

This might not happen, but even the mere possibility of such action spreading had industrialists running for cover last fortnight, and condemning the LIC move on Escorts.

Said Vinod Doshi, chairman of Premier Automobiles: "The board of Escorts was elected by the institutions only a few months ago, and there is another shareholders' meeting in a few months. What made it imperative for the institutions to establish their right of ownership suddenly, and change a board in which they had themselves shown confidence for many years? The only explanation is that they had an ulterior motive in doing this."

In Calcutta, industrialist G.P. Goenka said: "This episode marks the beginning of a trend to exercise greater control on companies, guided by political motives." And Keshub Mahindra, chairman of Mahindra & Mahindra argued that "any action of the type that LIC has now taken cannot but bring into question their future credibility. Pronouncements of autonomy of these institutions become meaningless when institutions take action of this type".

The chambers of commerce took up the refrain in a spreading outcry. Jahar Sengupta, president of the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said:" The LIC is supposed to look after the interests of its shareholders, and to make sure that its investments are safe. In the case of Escorts, how were the LIC's or its policy-holders' interests affected or threatened?" And FICCI President Ashok Jain felt that "if this can happen to a well-run company like Escorts, it can happen to anybody".

This last was a valid point, for Escorts has been one of LIC's finest and most lucrative investments, and a shaking of the company's management can only affect this adversely. Subrahmanyan of LIC lists two other compnanies (Shaw Wallace and Century Spinning & Weaving) that have yielded better bonuses for the corporation, but the shortness of this list is a compliment to Escorts. According to one calculation, Escorts accounts for no more than 0.28 per cent of LIC's share investments in the private sector, but has contributed close to 10 per cent of the total capital appreciation on these investments.

This clearly suggests that Escorts has been managed well in contrast with DCM, to go by its earnings, the other concern in the same boat which has turned in a lacklustre performance in the last six years and would have made a loss last year without financial jugglery. The action against Escorts may well be couched in terms of its aggressive stand in tackling the Paul threat and its unwillingness to bend before institutional pressure, but if it is sound management that the LIC wants, it is cutting their nose to spite its face.



"What made it imperative for the institutions to establish their right of ownership suddenly, and change a board in which they had shown confidence for so many years?"

—VINOD DOSHI,
Chairman, Premier Automobiles



"This episode marks the beginning of a trend to exercise greater control on companies, guided by political motives."

—G.P. GOENKA,
Chairman, Duncan Brothers



"Any action of the type that LIC has now taken cannot but bring into question their future credibility."

—KESHUB MAHINDRA,
Chairman, Mahindra & Mahindra

In this context, the Punjab, Haryana and Delhi Chamber of Commerce and Industry said: "It is ironical that those who are expected to safeguard the interests of good managements are using their majority power to destablise the existing managements."

Already, the potential threat carried in the institutions' voting power seemed to have many industrialists tongue-tied, reluctant to speak out against either the institutions or the Government for what they privately confessed was unjustified action. And there were predictions galore that industrialists would from now on look at the institutions with suspicion rather than trust, and that they would try to strengthen their shareholding position in their own companies.

In one case, Parvinder Singh of Ranbaxy Laboratories said that although his family controlled a good chunk of the company's shares, and the institutions had only a very small stake, they were working out legal arrangements with other companies for cross-holding of shares: each would invest in 5 per cent of the other's stock, forming a common defensive wall against any outside threats.

In a second case, a cement company in the Sahu Jain group has deferred a decision to double its capacity since this will involve borrowing Rs 30 crore from the financial institutions under a loan agreement that includes the normal clause for converting 20 per cent of the loan into equity shares. The loan has already been sanctioned, but a company spokesman said: "We are now reconsidering the project in the light of what has happened to Escorts."

Meanwhile, Arvind Dalal, a leading stockbroker and director of the merchant banking firm C.J. Dalal Financial Consultancy, argued: "The stock-market will become bullish right after this episode because a lot of industrial groups have started buying shares and increasing their own holdings in their companies."

If this is indeed happening, it will result in a reversal of the professionalisation process in companies. The world over, management holding in their companies have declined as the companies have grown, and over a period of time family managements inevitably give way to fully professional managements. This has already been happening in India, and many companies that are technically in the Tata group are run more by paid professionals than by the Tatas themselves. But now, with family management becoming insecure, and preceiving a threat to their positions in their companies, they will try and entrench themselves further, thus halting the process of professionalisation —which, in the ultimate analysis, must be defined as a divorce of management from ownership, following the inevitable logic of the joint stock system.

There could be other equally serious consequences of the LIC action. Over the last 20 years, the Government has fostered a mixed pattern of industrial growth in which both the public and the private sector have their legitimate role to play. At the same time, because the Government has concent-

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ntrol the vast bulk of investible funds in the hands of institutions owned by the Government, the private sector has no choice but to go to them for financing growth. After two decades, this has now resulted in the overwhelming power, however latent, that the institutions have over the companies. If the institutions exercise this power, it could threaten the mixed industrial pattern itself. Even if they don't, actions as in the case of Escorts could frighten industrialists into choosing to not grow rather than give the institutions a bridgehead in their companies.

It is also true, however, that the institutions now have such a virtual monopoly on funds that frequently the question of not borrowing from them simply does not arise. Said Ashok Jain: "Some companies may decide not to go to the institutions, but others will continue to borrow from them. It is impractical to expect that people will not go to the institutions."

And a Madras-based industrialist argued that there would be no major fall-out in the south because "we in the south have always believed in keeping family shareholdings high. This may be why we have grown more slowly than others, but it is a different culture here. So I think people will continue to go to the financial institutions".

The institutional spokesmen themselves firmly dismissed all talk of the relationship between them and company managements changing because of the LIC action. Punja of IDBI argues: "Cases like Escorts are isolated, and it should be clear to everyone that this is not the start of a new trend." The chairman of another public sector institution said: "You must forgive me if I take a cynical view of the behaviour of industrialists. They have always grown by using other people's money, and I do not see any reason why their behaviour will change. It is now 10 days since LIC took its action regarding Escorts, and I have met at least 100 industrialists since then. I have not seen any change in their attitude to the institutions."

Two institutional spokesmen also argued that they would from now on be taking a more active part in looking into the affairs of companies in which they have large shareholdings. Subrahmanyan of LIC argued that the institutions had often been accused of not doing this, and instead allowing private businessmen to play merry with public funds. Yet both he and Punja argued that it is difficult to lay down guidelines that could direct institutional behaviour in tricky situations.

Nevertheless, this is one of the issues which were considered by the Narasimham Committee appointed by the Government last year; the committee's report was submitted a few weeks ago, and is believed to have recommended the more activist role that some institutional spokesmen now mention.



"The LIC is supposed to look after the interests of its shareholders....in the case of Escorts, how were its policy-holders' interests affected?"

—JAHAR SENGUPTA, President, Assocham



"If this can happen to a well-run company like Escorts, it can happen to anybody."

—ASHOK JAIN, President, FICCI



"Cases like Escorts are isolated, and it should be clear to everyone that this is not the start of a new trend."

—M.R.B. PUNJA, Chairman, IDBI

Meanwhile, there were unpublicised developments on other fronts in the Swraj Paul tangle. The Government has reopened tax cases against both Escorts and H.P. Nanda. And when labour trouble broke out in the Escorts factory complexes in Faridabad, outside Delhi, as a result of the efforts by a Congress(I) union to muscle in, it was stated that this had the blessings of higher-ups in the party.

There were other developments in the case of DCM, also a target for Swraj Paul's share purchases. In one instance, Shriram Fibres, a subsidiary of DCM, had used Rs 1.7 crore of its funds to buy DCM shares—a move clearly designed to increase the Shriram family's shareholding power in the parent company. Surrendra Paul, who is a director of IDBI (which had lent a large sum to Shriram Fibres), protested to the financial institution about this, arguing that institutional funds had been misused to buy DCM's shares.

Punja of IDBI argued that they have looked into the matter, established that no funds diversion had in fact taken pace, but that the share purchases needed institutional clearance, and that such clearance had been withheld. Shriram Fibres will now have to offload these shares, failing which IDBI could well recall its loan to the company and deny it further loans, but Punja said IDBI did not plan to take any drastic action—a stand which contrasts with the LIC move on Escorts.

Also, the Punjab National Bank is believed to be initiating action against DCM, allegedly for the absence of goods that have been hypothecated to the bank. And in a parallel development, DCM Chairman Bharat Ram's younger brother, Charat Ram, who is DCM's managing director, has written to the former insisting that the company should not file any law suit against the Government in the manner that Escorts has done. Relations between the two brothers have been strained for some time now and this is now limiting the company management's room for manoeuvre in tackling the situation presented by Swraj Paul's massive share purchases.

Meanwhile, complaints have come into the Finance Ministry from three major banks pointing out that shares that they had accepted as collateral against loans had not been transferred by either DCM or Escorts, arguing that the collateral was therefore valueless, and seeking the Government's advice on whether the banks should continue to accept shares as security on loans. The ministry was apparently getting ready for action that would force share transfers, citing these complaints from the banks as a justification, for the move.

C.K. Hazari, former joint managing director of Escorts and now a management consultant, predicted that as one result of the share transfer controversy, the right of company managements to refuse share transfers would almost certainly be curtailed.

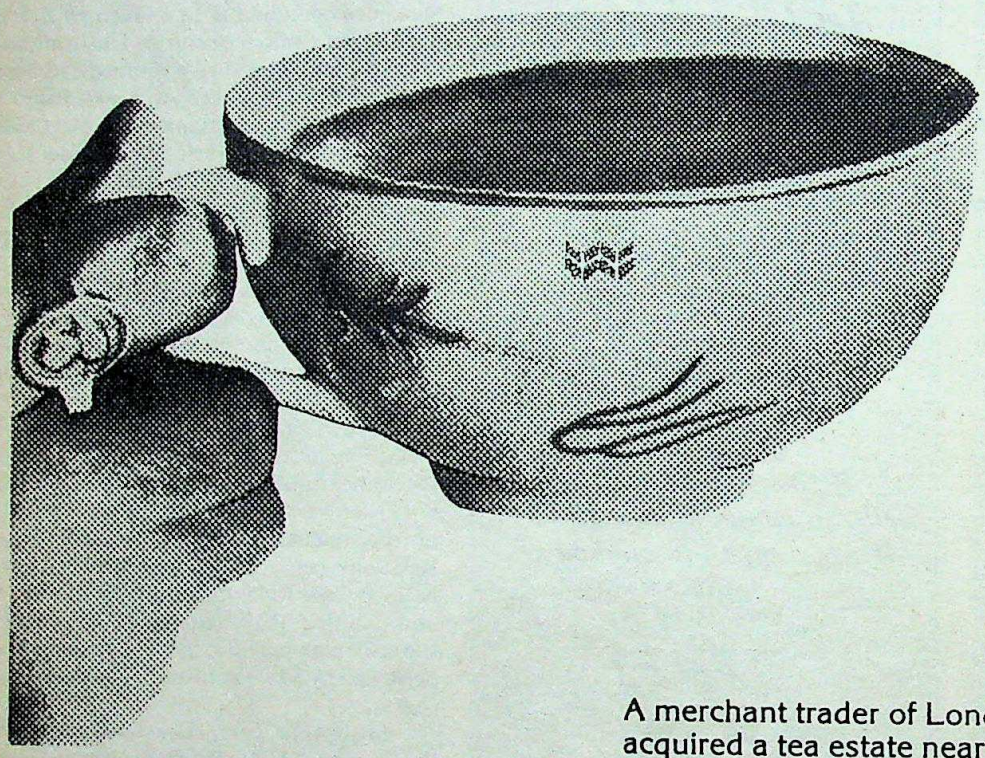
In one way or another, these suggested that pressure was mounting on the managements of both Escorts and DCM. And these promised new action in the continuing battle for the control of these companies—a battle that has been fought with great tenacity for months now.

Meanwhile, even if Nanda gets no sympathy from the courts, and his company's board of directors is reconstituted following the LIC action, Nanda's own position in the company does not seem threatened as yet, since he enjoys the status of a promo-

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The Sahib's brew is well known



A merchant trader of London, James Warren acquired a tea estate near Dibrugarh in Assam in 1850. And thereafter in 1858 his nephew took over his estate and developed new gardens on land in adjoining areas. By late 19th century these gardens bloomed into what is now the celebrated Warren Tea Group. But all that is history. The significant fact is that Warren Tea has established itself as a producer of premium quality teas and its brew is now well known all over the world. A tradition which the Sahib promises to continue.

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PRESSMAN

A new thrust. A new direction.

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er-founder and has, as the institutions themselves admit, been running the company well. "Why should we remove him?" one institutional spokesman asked.

For all that, the fact remains that if Nanda's desperate gamble in the court fails, the institutions will have a vast majority on the Escorts board, so that it will be they and not Nanda who will be in the driver's seat. Even if Nanda gains time through his court action, he clearly realises that no industrialist can afford to win in a battle with the Government.

In one way or another, the Government will eventually make sure that it wins. Nanda is aware of this, and his hope is that he will gain sufficient time, one way or another, to eventually arrive at a compromise. But at the moment, he is fighting with his back to the wall.

—T.N. NINAN and CHANDER UDAY SINGH

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Changing Role

MOST spokesmen of the financial institutions, and many industrialists as well, argue that in the past the institutions have acted with probity in ticklish takeover situations as well as in more normal circumstances. But there is a lengthening list of instances where the institutions have acted seemingly arbitrarily—and in almost all of them the central point stands out that it is the more influential industrialist who got the support of the institutions for a company takeover. Thus, Kamani Engineering Works was running very well under a team of professional managers appointed by the institutions, wiped out losses accumulated by the previous management, declared a bonus share issue and saw share prices skyrocketing because of the company's new-found prosperity. But when R.P. Goenka bought 10 per cent of the company's shares in a court auction of family holdings, he was promptly invited into the board as vice-chairman, the earlier managing commitee was rendered redundant, and control changed hands.

In the other case, that of National Rayon, untried industrialist Vijay Berlia controlled 16 per cent of the shares, a further one or 2 per cent which the institutional-run management refused to transfer, and roughly 15 to 16 per cent held in proxies following forward share purchases. Yet Berlia was refused a seat on the company's board, he was termed a troublemaker, and the institutions gladly acquiesced when the shares were finally transferred to G.P. Goenka, who was inducted into the management.

Yet a third case involves Standard Batteries. When L.D. Char, the company promoter, died in 1981, the institutions voted against giving members of the family a place on the board, and the company was instead virtually handed over to B.P. Khaitan, who when this happened had only a small shareholding plus the support of the company's 10 per cent foreign shareholding, whereas Char's family held 17 per cent. Only after numerous representations and press reports did Char's son, Raghav Char, get a place on the board a year later, but this was neutralised by bringing in Khaitan's son Deepak as well. Said Raghav Char: "Even today we have absolutely no say in the management of the company, while the Khaitans seem to have a major say in the running of the company."

And in yet another case, when newspaper tycoon Ramnath Goenka made a bid in the late 1960s and early 1970s for grabbing the Indian Iron and Steel Company from Biren Mukherjee, he tried initially to get the support of the institutional shareholding through parleys with the then finance minister Morarji Desai. But Desai was soon out of the Government, and when matters came to the crunch Mrs Gandhi is believed to have instructed the Reserve Bank to ask the institutions and shareholding banks to vote against Goenka—which they did. The company was later nationalised.

In the light of these cases, there is little doubt that the wiser industrialists were those who made sure that the institutions did not get into a position where they could crack the whip in their companies.

There is no common thread running through this welter of actions other than the fact that in almost all of them it was an influential industrialist who got his way, and the others who lost out. In fact, the chairman of one of the financial institutions admitted privately that in the Kamani Engineering case, the final decision was in effect a political one. The managing director of another institution also confessed privately to the existence of government pressure, but then hastily withdrew his comment.

When asked to comment on whether it was Swraj Paul's political influence that was making the institutions move against Escorts, Paul's younger brother Surrendra argued that in an earlier case his other brother Jit Paul's attempt to acquire Tinplate Company was frustrated by the Tatas, who wielded their influence and got control of the company. "Industrial houses have always needed political power," Surrendra Paul argued.

In the light of these cases, there is little doubt that the wiser industrialists were those who made sure that the institutions did not get into a position where they could crack the whip in their companies. The Birlas, for instance, hold as much as 49 per cent of Gwalior Rayon's shares. And B.K. Birla recounted last year how his father, G.D. Birla, had been extremely annoyed when grandson Aditya Birla decided to issue shares and debentures that effectively reduced the Birla holding in Indian Rayon to 16 per cent.

Vittal Mallya, who died a few months ago, was another industrialist who refused to accept institutional domination. And a spokesman of LIC recalled that Mallya was once so annoyed when LIC nominees raised what he considered trivial objections regarding one of his companies that he wrote them if they were not satisfied with the working of his company they were welcome to sell their holdings in it, and that he would be perfectly willing to buy them out.

In the case of the Singhanias, a Bombay stockbroker said the group was adamant on retaining a strong shareholding base in Straw Products at a time when the company was raising its share capital from Rs 4.2 crore to Rs 9.2 crore at a time when the institutions could convert a part of their outstanding loan to the company into shares worth Rs 1.6 crore. They reportedly engineered a government "directive" under the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act under which the Singhanias would have to buy a substantial percentage of a new debenture issue that could later be converted into shares worth Rs 1.75 crore, which would neutralise the fresh shareholdings of the institutions.

In contrast to these strategies, groups like Tatas, Mahindras and Escorts have left themselves extremely vulnerable to institutional pressure, especially now that the role of the institutions is undergoing a change.

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MARKFED

Ailing Monolith

FOR MARKFED, India's largest apex cooperative, losses have become a way of life. It has not had a good year since 1976 when it ploughed heavily into the red. This year while its turnover has climbed to over Rs 1,000 crore, its accumulated losses stand at a whopping Rs 40 crore.

Markfed now survives on a combination of hefty bank loans and a lavish dole from the state Government. It has wiped out its cash reserves and surplus of Rs 13.41 crore and also its share capital of Rs 11.30 crore. In 1976 the cooperative dipped into the red with a loss of Rs 1.79 crore. In 1981-82 this had shot up to nearly Rs 10 crore. In 1982-83 it needed a series of stringent measures to keep the losses at Rs 4.5 crore. Says Managing Director Rupan Deol Bajaj: "Markfed has been indulging in some kind of social adventures."

Bajaj admits that mismanagement in past years has taken its toll. This is almost understating the case. The catalogue of Markfed's misadventures is long and appalling. Examples:

► Markfed ran up losses of Rs 3.05 crore in 1979 when it was asked to buy potatoes from the market to clear a glut. Out of this amount Rs 1.5 crore is still outstanding from the Government. But the remaining losses can be attributed to Markfed's own inept handling;

► It has yet to collect Rs 18.37 crore from a string of cooperative marketing societies and district wholesale societies in the sprawling mandis of Punjab. Bajaj doubts whether much of this can be recovered since a number of the societies have shut down shop. And since others are backed by influential politicians the chances of collecting money from them is bleak;

► It supplied on credit cotton worth Rs 2.06 crore in 1980 to a public sector unit, Punjab Spinning and Weaving Mill, Bhatinda. Later the Punjab State Industrial Development Corporation (PSIDC) sold the unit without paying back Markfed. Markfed did not go to court or take any other steps to protect its investment beyond writing to the Government at that time. Says Bajaj: "Due to the negligence of the PSIDC, Markfed's money is blocked and there is no likelihood of its recovery due to wrong settlement effected at the time of selling the mill."

► The state Government has not paid Rs 2.7 crore deducted out of fertiliser subsidy claims made by Markfed in 1976;

► Markfed says it lost Rs 7.12 crore on the incidental expenses of wheat and paddy procurement for the Central pool. This is, however, contested by the Food Corporation of India.

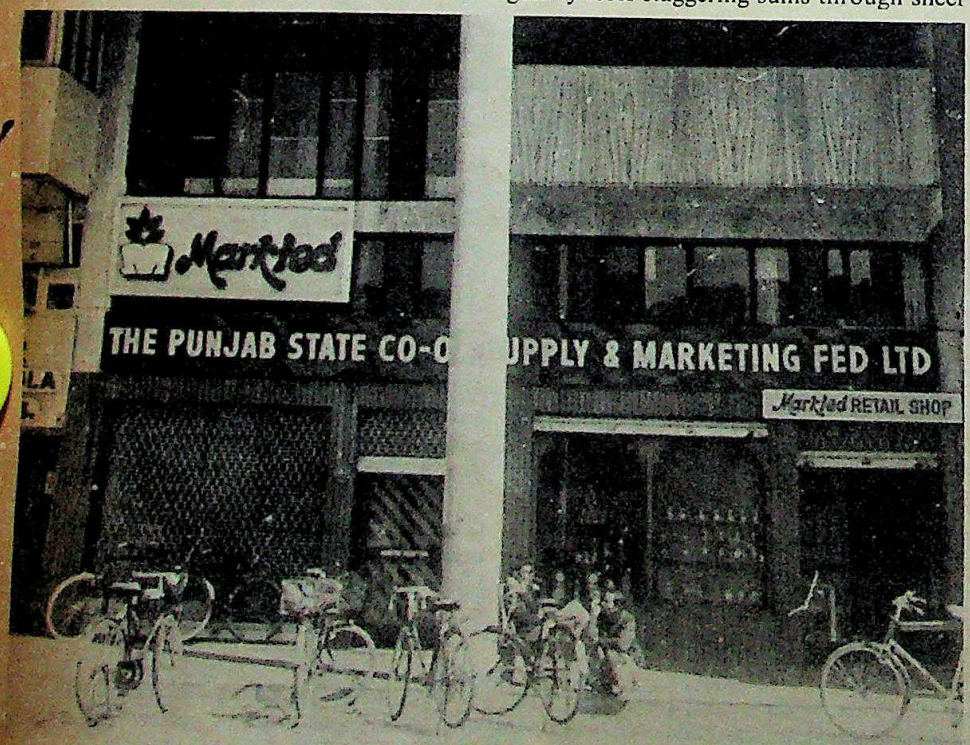
If all this was not enough, Markfed regularly loses staggering sums through sheer bad planning and mismanagement. Out of 24 service and industrial units scattered throughout the state only eight are making any profit. The accumulated losses of many units are more than twice the initial capital cost of the projects.

The most amazing part of this is that it manages to lose money in fields where the private sector usually flourishes. Its canneries at Jalandhar have altogether lost more than Rs 3.61 crore. The factory has to struggle against the odds with mismatched equipment, heavy overheads and a shortage of raw material.

Similarly its agro-aviation wing and combine harvesting units are also surprisingly underutilised. The agro-aviation squadron with two G-5 helicopters and two fixed wing aircraft apparently cannot find enough work in Punjab and lost Rs 34 lakh between 1981 and 1983. Its combine harvesting unit has lost money steadily for the last 10 years. This is in stark contrast to private owners who manage to make up the capital costs of a combine harvestor within approximately three years. Talking about the agro-aviation unit Bajaj says: "The work available in Punjab is inadequate and we cannot compete with other operators in the south."

Most disastrous of all is Markfed's foray into the fertiliser business. Its three factories at Ludhiana, Dhuri and Anandpur Sahib have an installed capacity of 48,000 tonnes but they have never produced anywhere near that. Markfed's fertilisers have never been popular with the farmers

The catalogue of Markfed's misadventures is long and appalling.

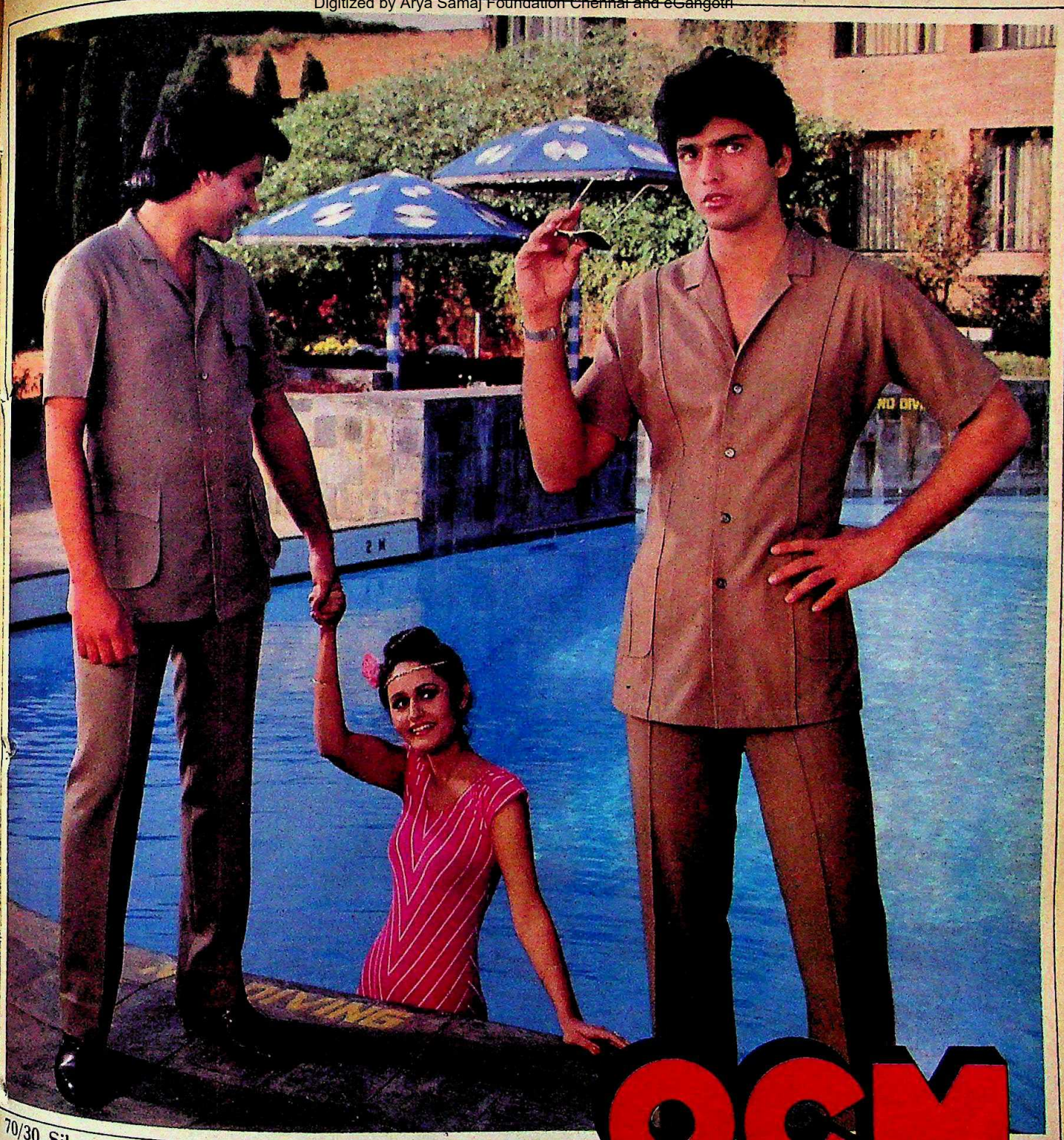




Markfed headquarters and (right) its products: taking heavy losses

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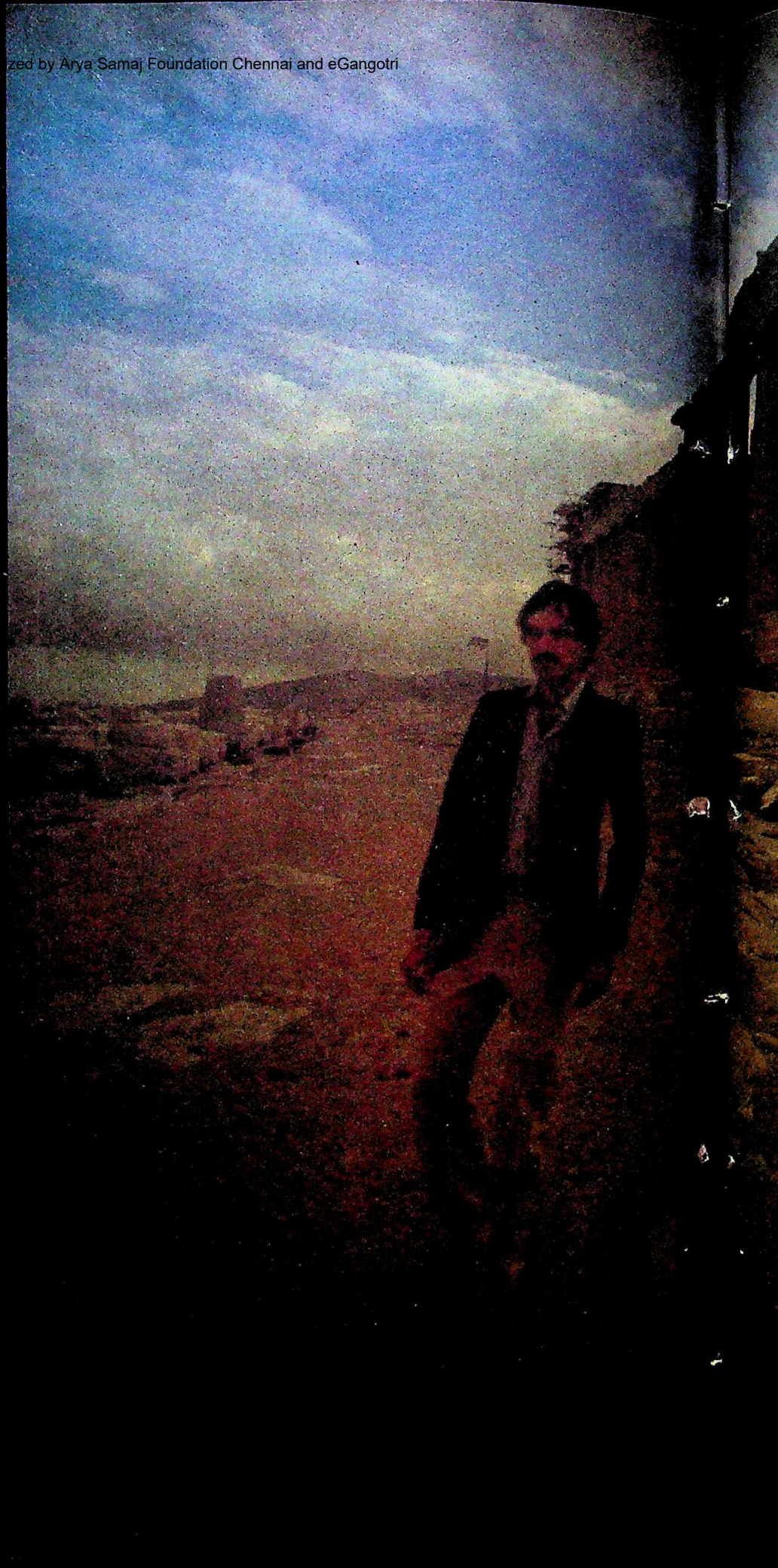
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You become aware of the Parthenon the minute you arrive in Athens.

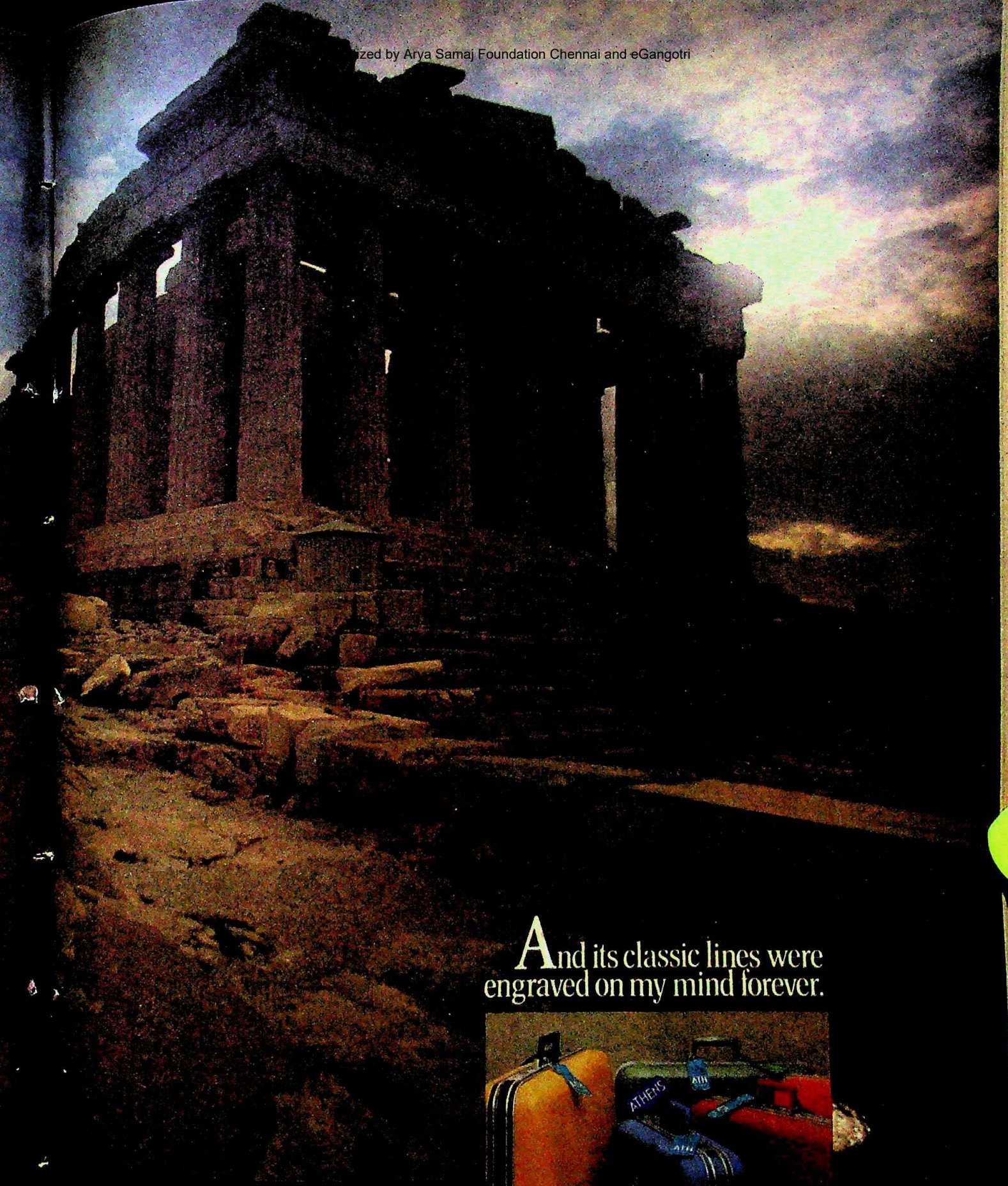
It has stood there for centuries, this silent colossus, its gigantic stone columns rising all at once, together, as if in a grand gesture applauding the genius of Man.

"It s like shaking hands with the past," I thought, and felt a chill down my spine.

I stood there transfixed.



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And its classic lines were engraved on my mind forever.



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ANIL PURI

Kashyap (left) and Hero: at loggerheads

nd two units at Anandpur Sahib and Dhuri ere closed in 1978. Now, it has decided to ell the unit at Anandpur Sahib. The Ludhia- unit has stayed in business by reprocess- g old and damaged fertilisers.

To make matters worse the cooperative s, since last year, become a battleground r politicians and bureaucrats. The disputes gan when the cooperative act was amen- d to make the chairman the principal exe- ive of the corporation instead of the ma- ging director. As soon as the act was ended, Harcharan Singh Hero, a Con- ss(I) MLA, was appointed chairman.

Hero at once found himself at logger- eads with the then managing director Rajan ashyap and the Registrar of Cooperative cieties C.L. Bains. Kashyap refused to rk under Hero. But Hero himself only ted a short time. He claims that his tenure s eminently successful and that he was to save Markfed huge amounts of oney but that he was stymied by bureau- ats. In a letter to Rajiv Gandhi in Decem- r 1983, he said: "Although I saved Mark- d Rs 5.43 crore by bringing down the loss m Rs 9.95 to Rs 4.52 crore by slashing sur- s staff, greater inventory control and re- ced expenditure, yet I was unequal to this sby. They wanted Markfed to be run as ir personal outfit." Kashyap and Bains ay charges against them and say losses re cut because the organisation had come more professional. Says Bains: "We ve no vested interest in Markfed."

Both sides are now angrily trading char- . The bureaucrats allege that the poli- ans are dishing out jobs to all and sundry rther their political interests. Hero nters this saying that nearly Rs 1 crore been squandered in the name of profess- alisation. He also accuses various offi- ls of wilful negligence in a rice deal in 1981 en Markfed undertook to supply 4 lakh nes of basmati rice to Daman.

As a result of one clause of the agree- nt Markfed is said to have lost nearly 63 lakh. Each of the top officers has ed responsibility for the deal but Hero stions the very need for the deal, saying: arkfed is there to look after interests of jab's farmers and not to purchase rice outside the state for export. This basmati is not traditional Punjab produce. Moreover the board of directors was never consulted as required for such a major deal." Hero also claims that his unearthing of irregularities in the rice deal induced a coterie of bureaucrats to exert their influence and have his powers taken away.

There are only a few bright spots in the whole Markfed story. Its Vanaspati and Allied Industries at Khanna is still raking in vast profits that partially counteract the losses in other fields. Its cement pipe plants at Ropar, Sarna and Singhpura are also doing their bit by turning in about Rs 3 lakh to Rs 4 lakh as profits every year. But in its main activity of procuring wheat and paddy Markfed has turned in losses of Rs 9.78 crore in three years between 1980 and 1983. Only wheat procurement in 1983 managed to make a slight profit of Rs 34.74 lakh. Hero made six industrial units profitable during his tenure as against five the earlier year.

Hero has waged a ceaseless war for a probe into the rice deal. He recently met Rajiv Gandhi about the matter. But an inquiry into one deal alone is not likely to help clean up the abysmal mess in the country's biggest cooperative marketing body.

—GOBIND THUKRAL

THE MARKETS

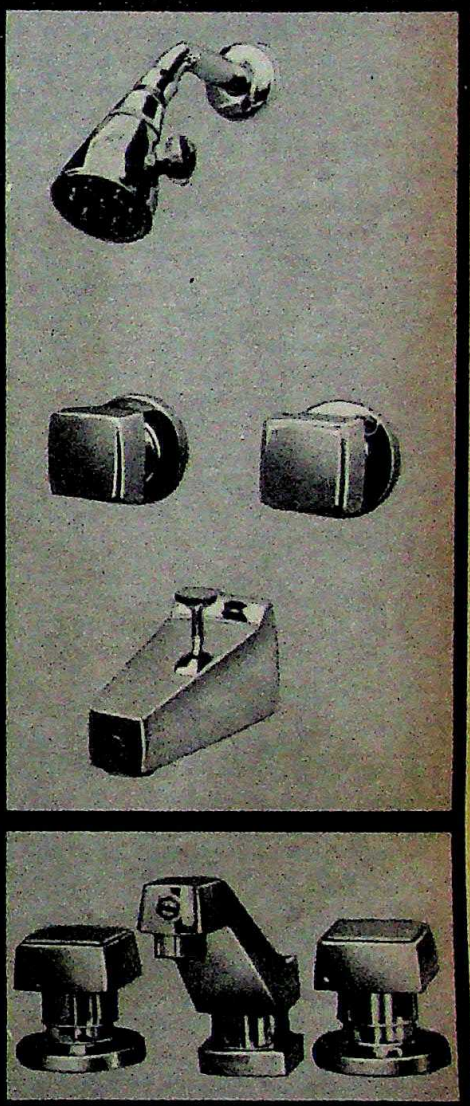
Waiting Game

IT IS remarkable how institutions, like most living organisms, develop immunity to all types of malevolence when their survival is at stake. About this time five years ago, companies like Tata Steel, Telco and Hindustan Aluminium had a number of powerful politicians running after their blood, but nothing really happened. The markets have a way of discounting false threats in much the same way village grocers weed out false coins.

Budget time is always a bad time for share markets and operators on Dalal Street were cautious throughout the fortnight though that did not prevent them from pushing up some shares and pulling down others, with the net result that the market as a whole continued in its listless state. Premier Automobiles and Century Spinning have perked up, the latter on the hopes of a bonus issue, while Bajaj Auto and National Organic have beaten a retreat. Indian Aluminium, once the bluest of blue chips, has reported a loss for the first time in 30 years and the proposal for its merger with Mahindra & Mahindra has come unstuck. This may be good news for the shareholders of Mahindra & Mahindra who were not too happy about the take-over anyway and the scrip gained 4 points in the bargain.

There are reports, or rather rumours, that the long-suffering cotton mills may be in

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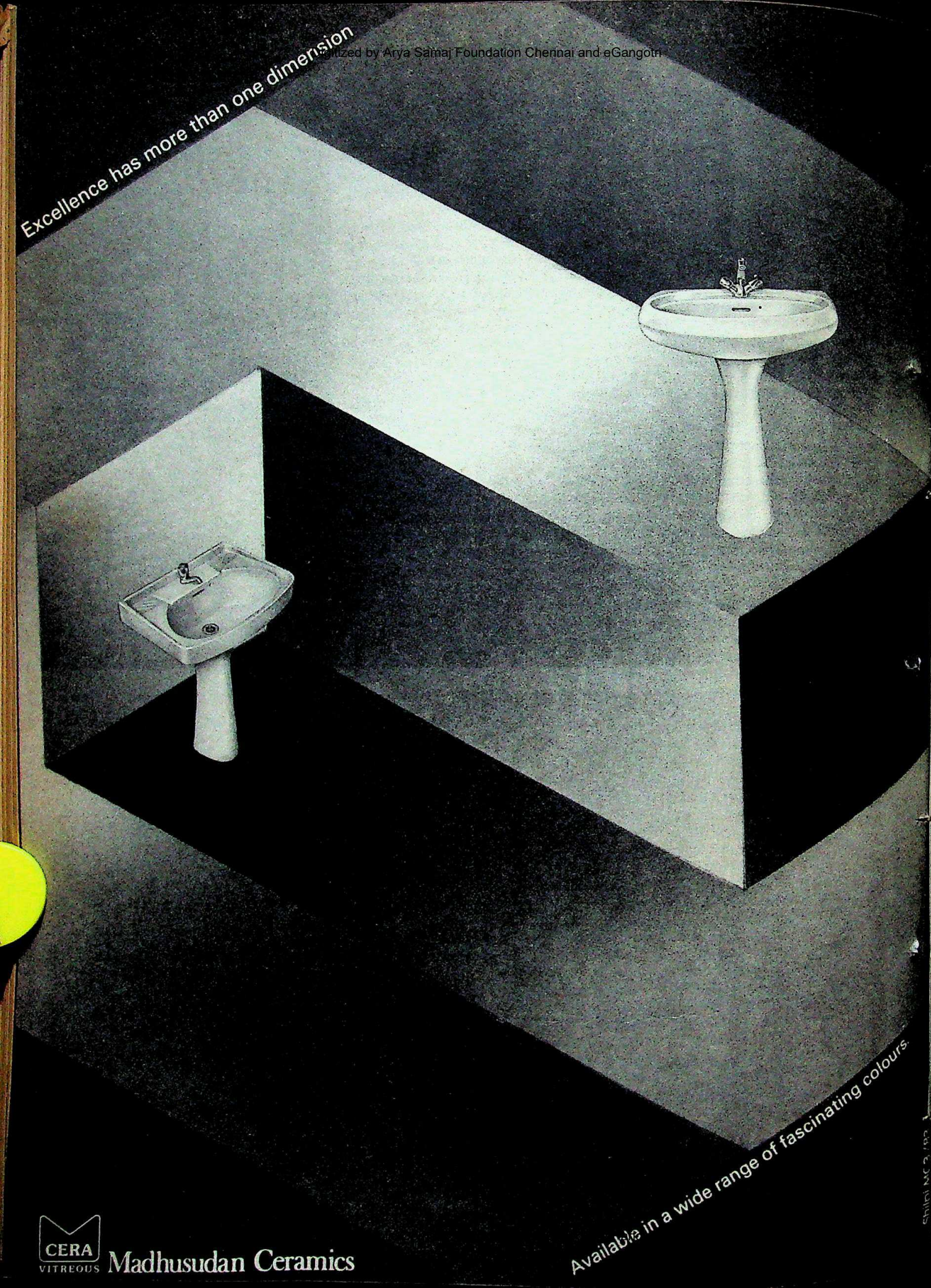
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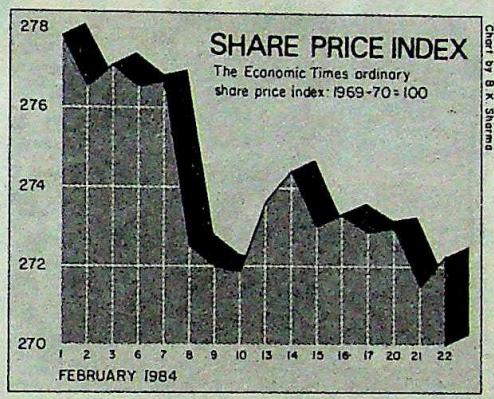


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ACTIVE STOCKS

	High	Low	Close	Change on Fortnight
	1984		17.2.84	
Ahmedabad Advance	141.25	112.50	112.50	(7.50)
Asea	53.00	48.00	50.00	2.00
Ashok Leyland	37.50	32.50	36.00	(0.50)
Associated Cement	381.50	343.00	366.00	21.00
Atlas Copco	43.00	37.50	39.00	nil
Bajaj Auto	1715.00	1510.00	1570.00	(30.00)
Ballarpur	50.40	47.00	49.25	0.75
Baroda Rayon	260.00	243.00	260.00	15.00
BASF	49.00	43.00	43.00	(3.00)
Birla India	37.20	33.30	37.20	2.20
Bharat Commerce	20.65	16.80	17.10	(0.95)
Birla Jute	58.30	54.20	58.00	1.20
Blow Plast	45.00	42.50	45.00	2.00
Bombay Dyeing	70.00	63.50	65.00	1.00
Boots	56.00	45.00	48.00	1.00
Britannia	38.00	35.00	35.90	0.90
Brooke Bond	36.00	34.10	35.10	0.80
Ceat Tyres	280.00	262.50	277.50	2.50
Century Spinning	905.00	825.00	905.00	30.00
Chloride India	49.40	46.25	49.25	1.25
Coates of India	28.62	26.50	28.62	0.12
Colgate	114.00	100.00	105.50	(3.50)
Cyanamid	41.50	35.00	41.50	4.50
DCM	76.12	57.50	59.75	(1.37)
Dunlop	27.60	26.40	26.50	(0.50)
East India Hotels	32.00	29.00	31.25	0.13
Elecon Engineering	43.50	39,00	40.00	(0.50)
Escorts	76.00	64.00	67.75	(1.25)
Food Specialities	80.00	71.00	76.50	(2.50)
Guest Keen Williams	22.10	21.50	21.50	(0.45)
Gwalior Rayon	57.00	49.00	54.75	(0.75)
Herdillia Chemicals	25.00	22.00	23.00	nil
Hindustan Aluminium	50.05	47.50	47.80	(0.40)
Hindustan Lever	58.50	47.75	48.50	(0.25)
Hindustan Motors	42.20	40.40	41.26	0.10
Indian Aluminium	24.80	19.45	19.45	(3.65)
Indian Cable	24.10	20.40	20.40	(3.10)
Indian Explosives	28.00	26.20	27.40	0.70
Indian Organic	34.00	31.00	31.75	0.75
Indian Oxygen	36.90	34.80	36.90	1.80
Indian Rayon	75.50	66.50	68.50	1.50
ITC	32.50	30.25	30.50	(0.15)
J.K. Synthetics	47.60	44.20	44.90	(0.20)
Kelvinator	94.00	90.00	94.00	nil
Kesoram	61.60	57.10	58.40	0.60
Kinetic Engineering	135.00	115.00	120.00	(7.00)
Kirloskar Cummins	447.50	425.00	435.00	(7.50)
Kothari (Madras)	26.25	23.25	24.00	0.25
Larsen & Toubro	79.50	74.50	76.50	nil
Lipton	33.80	24.60	24.80	0.60
Lokia Machines	87.00	70.00	78.00	(0.50)
Madura Coats	24.25	23.00	23.25	(0.25)
Mahindra & Mahindra	61.50	52.00	60.00	4.00
Modi Rubber	28.00	26.37	27.12	0.12
Motor Industries	252.50	227.50	232.50	1.25
National Organic	208.25	182.00	182.00	(18.00)
Orient Paper	53.80	42.30	53.80	nil
Otis Elevator	57.50	54.00	55.50	(2.00)
Ranbaxy	55.00	47.00	47.00	(2.00)
Raymond Woollen	69.50	63.00	64.00	nil
Reliance	123.00	111.50	113.00	(2.00)
Richardson Hindustan	70.00	60.00	65.00	2.00
Sandvik Asia	680.00	610.00	647.50	(2.50)
Shriram Fibres	34.50	30.47	32.75	nil
Siemens	47.50	43.00	45.25	(0.25)
SPIC	32.75	29.62	30.06	(0.25)
Sriram Products	57.00	50.00	51.00	nil
Tata Chemicals	58.00	54.50	55.00	(1.00)
Tata Steel	288.00	252.00	285.00	17.50
Tobo	423.00	395.00	418.00	(2.00)
Tecmaco	58.40	54.30	55.60	(0.50)
Union Carbide	28.90	25.50	25.80	0.10
Voltas	395.00	335.00	337.00	(3.00)
Wimco	43.50	28.50	40.75	(2.25)
20th Century	49.00	32.00	34.00	(5.00)
Unit Trust	13.80	13.65	13.80	nil

for some excise relief in the coming budget but most cotton mills have been taken over by the Government and those that have not been are not worth a second look. Excise reliefs, or some other hand-outs, may also be on the cards in respect of the steel industry, which is possibly one reason why Tata Steel is looking up. The Government is said to be worried about SAIL (Steel Authority of India) and its mounting losses and may announce some reliefs to bail out the ailing giant. The aluminium industry may also be in for some such hand-outs, but perhaps not yet.



The ups and downs before the budget do not really mean much, for it is unlikely that anyone is privy to the finance minister's thinking. What matters are the ups and downs in industrial production which, despite the usual claims by government spokesmen has got into a rut and there are few signs of an immediate breakthrough on the horizon. Under such conditions, the marketmen have little to go by except odd hunches.

What is actually holding up the market is inflation, for without a steady increase in prices and, therefore, profits, there is nothing really to sustain it. The production of Indian Aluminium company, for instance, has been pegged at the same level for more than a decade, though profits in money terms have gone up and down. There are quite a few other companies in the same boat and it is probably a matter of time before they too begin showing red patches in their accounts. Companies that do well are those which, like Escorts and Reliance, come up with steady increases in physical output year after year, but such companies are not really all that many. Ashok Leyland, Bajaj Auto, Chloride, Indian Rayon, Larsen & Toubro, etc are doing well mainly because of this reason.

If the budget helps them step up their production and add to their capacity, it will be a good budget and will also help the market keep its end up. The general impression is that it will do so, for no other reason than that it may be Pranab Mukherjee's last budget. The next elections are due in less than a year's time, and who knows what might happen after that?

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

Country	Unit & Currency	TT Selling Rates (Rs)	TT Buying Rates (Rs)
Australia	1 As $	10.1685	10.0499
Austria	100 As Sch	57.1610	56.5973
Bahrain	1 Dinar	28.4466	28.2411
Bangladesh	100 Taka	44.3372	44.8278
Canada	1 Can. $	8.7042	8.6144
Denmark	1 D. Kr	1.1022	1.0906
Egypt	1 Egp. £	13.2653	13.1728
France	1 Fr Frc	1.3042	1.2908
Hong Kong	1 Hk $	1.3940	1.3800
Indonesia	100 Rupiah	1.1972	1.0995
Iran	100 Rial	12.4753	12.3993
Italy	100 It Lira	0.6507	0.6439
Japan	100 Jap Yen	4.6474	4.5997
Kenya	1 K. shilling	0.8854	0.7939
Kuwait	1 Dinar	37.4620	37.2006
Malaysia	1 Ml $	4.6522	4.6025
Mauritius	1 Rupee	0.8539	0.8480
Nepal	1 Rupee	0.6920	0.6872
Netherlands	1 D Glds	3.5680	3.5306
Pakistan	1 Rupee	0.8171	0.8114
Singapore	1 Sing. $	5.1074	5.0519
Spain	100 Sp Pt	7.0370	6.9715
Sri Lanka	1 Rupee	0.4377	0.4347
Sweden	1 Sw Kr	1.3619	1.3456
Switzerland	1 Sw Frc	4.9023	4.8517
Tanzania	1 T. Sch	0.8854	0.8793
Thailand	100 Baht	47.3152	46.8998
UK	1 Pound	15.6850	15.5473
USA	1 US $	10.8350	10.7225
UAE	1 Dihram	2.9988	2.9759
USSR	1 Rouble	13.4764	13.6508
W. Germany	1 DM	4.0202	3.9798

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo, Ltd., New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 22.2.1984.

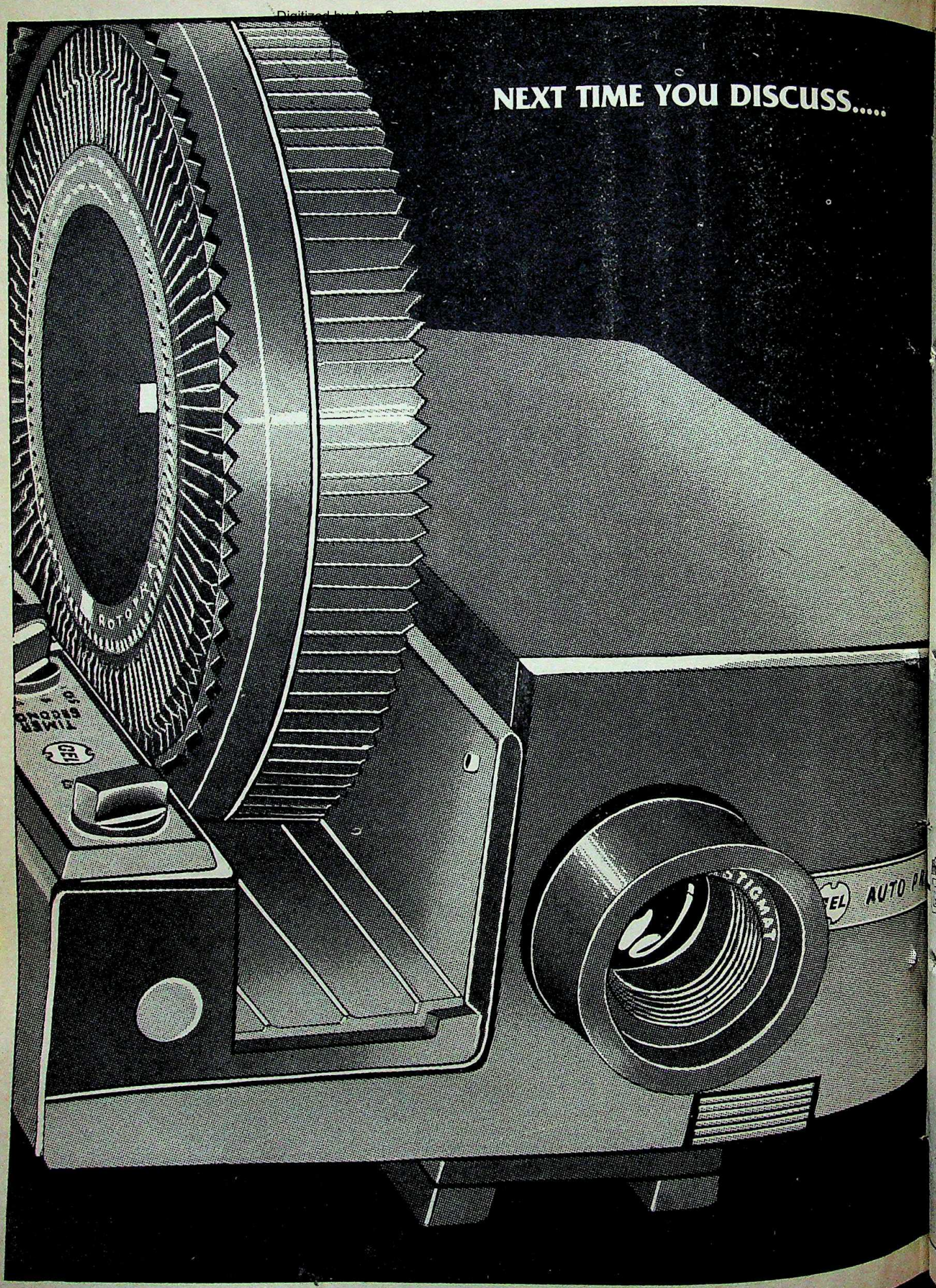
ECONOMIC TRENDS

	Latest	Change on month
PRICES		
ET Commodity Price Index*		
February 17, 1984	286.6	1.6
Cereals	257.7	(3.0)
Chemicals	330.3	6.0
Industrial Fibres	194.7	1.4
Metals	375.1	0.5
Sugar	207.6	7.2
Textile Yarn	224.4	1.7
Vegetable Oils	368.4	3.3
Gold, standard, February 17, 1984 (Rs per 10 gm)	1,895.00	(5.00)
Silver, .999 February 17, 1984 (Rs per kg)	3,455.00	(5.00)
SHARES		
ET Share Price Index* February 17, 1984	272.9	(0.7)
Cement	221.6	(11.8)
Chemicals	218.7	2.9
Engineering	489.3	(4.9)
Fertilisers	250.6	6.5
Man-made Fibres	414.9	11.2
Paper	567.2	22.3
Rubber Goods	186.5	(6.7)
MONEY		(per cent)
Money Supply, January 20, 1984		2.2
Bank Deposits		2.3
Foreign Exchange Assets		6.2

* 1969–70 = 100

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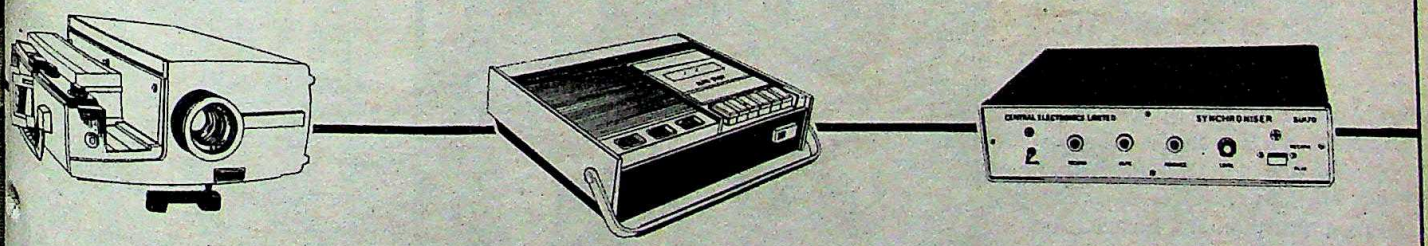
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BIHAR

Private Armies

MURDERS aren't news in Bihar any more. Nevertheless, last month's brutal slaying of student leader Prem Chand Sinha near Patna was an exception. Sinha, according to the police, had fallen victim to the landlords' dreaded "Bhoomi Sena" which has allegedly terrorised villages in Patna district. That Sinha was gunned down at point-blank range in a public place brought home the shocking fact that private armies operate in the state with virtual impunity. Four members of the gang, including one of its leaders, Beni Singh, were arrested. Police in every district has been alerted to keep an eye on all the various senas in the state. Chief Minister Chandra Shekhar Singh declared that the activities of the Bhoomi Sena would no longer be tolerated. But the Bihar Rajya Chhatra Sangharsh Morcha, of which the murdered youth was the convenor, was not convinced. It called a bandh on February 10, and an immediate ban on the activities of the "criminal gang known as the Bhoomi Sena".

Sinha was known to be a sympathiser of the leftist India People's Front, and had been actively associated with the land struggle in the rural areas of Patna district. Other attempts had been made on his life—one just three months before—and for a while he had been provided with a security guard. In a first information report filed soon after the abortive bid to kill him, Sinha alleged that Beni Singh and his cohorts in the sena were a "permanent threat" to his life. The police say they have "strong reasons" to believe his murder was the handiwork of the landlords' sena because they claim Sinha himself had a hand in the murder of a Bhoomi Sena activist, Lallan Singh, one of the main accused in the Pipra Harijan carnage case. Singh was gunned down in his hostel room soon after being released from jail on parole last year.

Whatever the truth, the Bhoomi Sena has been responsible for such acts of violence before. For instance, last October, 11 "soldiers" of the sena were arrested for the murder of Lalbabu Singh, mukhiya of Parthu panchayat, and a crusader for the rights of the kisans. A charge-sheet identified three prominent members of the sena. Among them was Awadhesh Singh, mukhiya of Potahi panchayat and upramukh of Punpun block, whose "bunglings" had been exposed by the murdered man. He and Beni Singh, also named in the charge-sheet, now languish in jail for the death of Prem Chand Sinha. The last of the trio, Girish Singh, "commander" of the sena, was also arrested for attacking a Harijan youth.

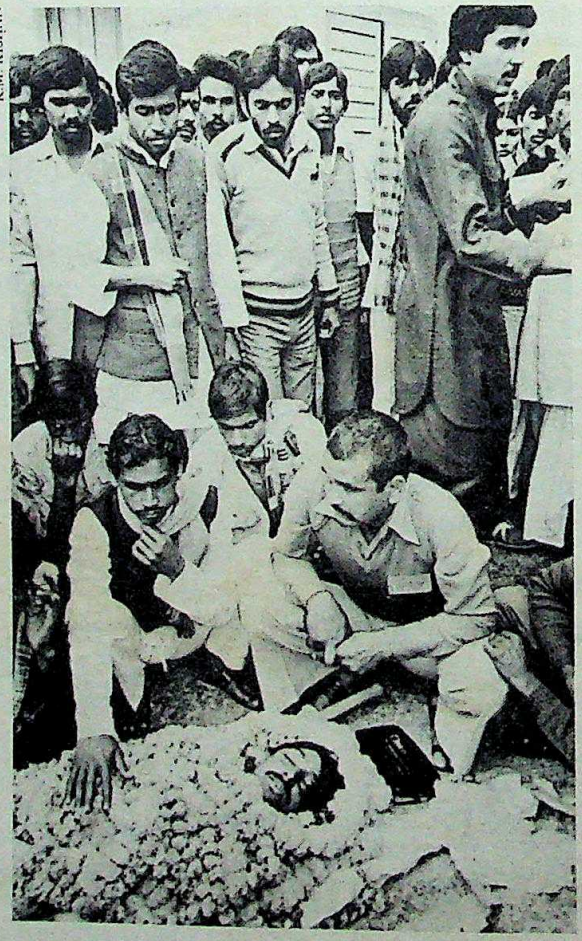
The region spanning Gaya, Patna and Nalanda districts has been in the grip of a vicious circle of exploitation by landlords, resistance by the landless and plenty of violence all around. Not surprisingly, it has become a bustling manufacturing centre of illegal arms. Since last October, the police has seized at last 32 licensed rifles and guns, and an equal number of illegal arms, a mere five of them from "extremists". Extremist involvement on the one hand and a pernicious landlord-police axis on the other have only served to aggravate the situation. If the kisans have their Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha, the Bihar Mazdoor Kisan Sangram Samiti and now the India People's Front, other communities haven't hung back either. Senas have flourished dramatically over the past few years. Some of the active ones are:

- the Kuer Sena of the Rajputs;
- the Azad Sena of the Brahmins and others;
- the Srikrishna Sena of the Yadavs;
- a branch of the Bramharshi Sena, all active in the Bhojpur district where the Naxalite movement first began;
- the Samajvadi Krantikari Sena of the Rajputs;
- and the Soshit Samajvadi Sena of the backward classes. The last two operate in Saharsa district.

If the kisans got together to protect themselves and their women from marauding henchmen of the landlords, the landed organised themselves as a reaction to this phenomenon. Wild rumours were spread about extremist activity, with landlords claiming that farmers were being held to ransom. There were reports of executions, rough courts set up by the extremists, tolls and controls imposed on the movement of foodgrain from villages. Spurred by such rumours and egged on by the landlords, police swooped in, arresting and even shooting villagers. In the midst of all this alarm and confusion, the landlords gathered in strength in Mukhdampur and set up their own army, the Kisan Suraksha Samiti. By April 1981, this had become the Bhoomi Sena.

According to Patna police, this group alone has accounted for at least 35 lives in Patna district, and in nearby Jehanabad sub-division of Gaya district, 12 Harijans, branded "extremists", have been annihilated. Police also says that practically the entire young generation of the Kurmi community has been indoctrinated by the Bhoomi Sena, and a "sense of violence" injected in their minds.

The Bhoomi Sena has now begun to collect tolls in the areas it dominates from poor or marginal farmers in exchange for "protection". This money, says the police, often goes into piling up arms and fighting court cases. A senior Janata Party leader adds that against the sena's target of Rs 70 lakh, Rs 40 lakh has already been collected for its "self-defence". Senior Police Superintendent Kishore Kunal says that in a bid to curtail its activities the district administration is now studying a proposal to impose fines on the villages where the Bhoomi Sena is most active.



K.M. KISHAN

That Sinha was gunned down at point-blank range in a public place brought home the shocking fact that private armies operate in the state with impunity.

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Nawal Kishore Sinha, Patna District Board chairman and chairman of the Congress(I)-supported Bihar Pradesh Kisan Congress and also the main accused in the Urban Cooperative Bank scandal case, is alleged to be one of the founders of the Bhoomi Sena. But Sinha denies any such connection, and even goes so far as to claim that the Bhoomi Sena does not exist. What he does say is that the tension in the region has become increasingly unbearable with at least 70 farmers killed by "extremists" in the past three years. He claims that farmers are too scared to leave their homes after dark. Other landlords of the area gamely add that it is because of such provocation that the youth of their community have been forced to take it upon themselves to "protect the kisans". But the police at least is convinced that the Bhoomi Sena does exist and in fact has a rather formidable hold over the region. Says SPS Kunal: "In the three districts of Patna, Nalanda and Gaya, the Bhoomi Sena has more active members than the police force." He estimates that nearly 10 per cent of the entire Kurmi population is actively involved with the sena.

Reports by third parties have also come out pretty strong against the landlords. According to the People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR), private armies of the dominant classes have mowed down a total of 185 peasants and political activists between January 1980 and June 1983. Says PUDR President Gobind Mukhoty: "The majority of the victims were poor peasants who had formed organisations to demand their due share of land, minimum wages and employment opportunities." The state unit of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) claims that over 100 landless labourers have been brutalised and killed by the landlord-police axis. Adds General Secretary, Shashi Shekhar: "Bihar has become the graveyard of civil and democratic rights." SPS Kunal's computations are just as startling. On a tour to the area last year, he found that 52 men had been killed—32 of them by the Bhoomi Sena and the rest by "extremists".

Former minister and executive member of the Lok Dal, Bhola Prasad Singh points out that criminals have penetrated both the warring classes, leading to more complications. Worse, in some instances the local police also appears to be taking sides. Last month, according to the Patna police, the local police of Ghoshi stormed Anatpur village in a pre-dawn raid, arresting 14 Harijans and harassing those who refused to pay the Bhoomi Sena toll. The terrorised victims were brought to Deoramath, hanged upside down and beaten by the police in the presence of Bhoomi Sena thugs. Gaya district Khet Mazdoor Union President B.P. Singh actually claims that it is the police in league with the sena hoodlums who are masquerading as Naxalites to create terror and disorder. On the other hand, local Janata Party



A Bhoomi Sena demonstration in Bihar: alarming influence

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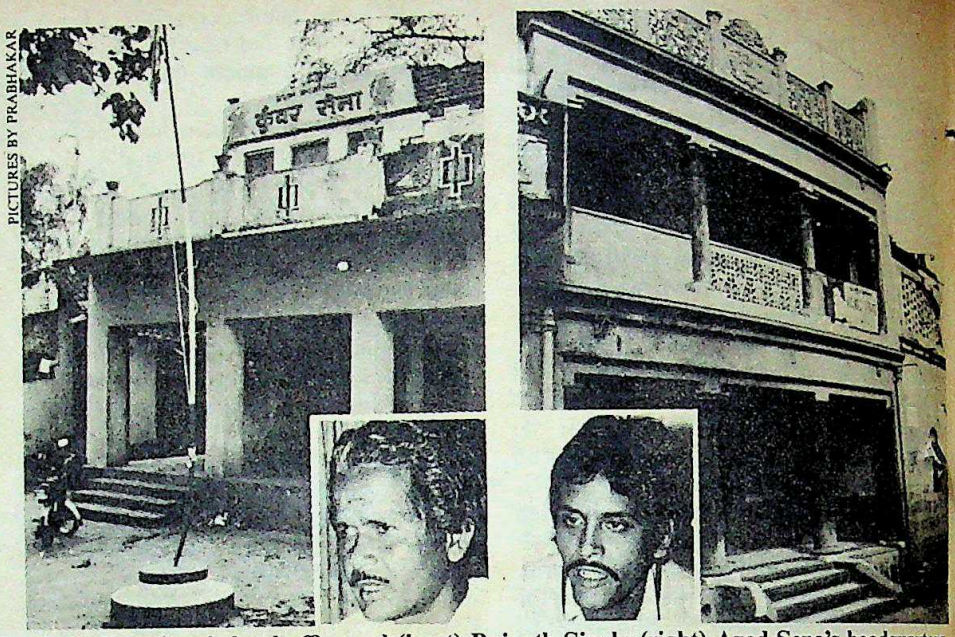


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PICTURES BY PRABHAKAR



(Left) Kuer Sena's head office and (inset) Rajnath Singh; (right) Azad Sena's headquarters and (inset) Mohan Dubey: a proliferation of senas

leader Thakur Munishwar Nath Singh maintains stoutly that it is the "extremists" who have been operating there, and have in fact killed 100 people in Jehanabad alone.

Apart from the Bhoomi Sena, another group that wields influence in the same region is the Bramharshi Sena of the Bhumihar community. It is headed by Sardar Krishna Singh, MLA, a former National Security Act detenu who is at all times accompanied by a group of rough-looking armed men. He says: "People think it as something like a terrorist group because of me, as I am a tough man and do not tolerate a wrong thing. In reality, this is just a youth wing of the Bramharshi Parishad, and its main purpose is to unite the youth force." The sena was set up last year during the national convention of the Bramharshi Parishad.

The Kuer Sena was set up at Arrah (Bhojpur district) in 1969 to combat the Naxalite movement, and modelled along the lines of the Shiv Sena of Maharashtra. It was the first "sena" in Bihar. Its leader, Rajnath Singh, 45, who was arrested under the Bihar Crime Control Act in 1980, says loftily that the aim of his sena is "to liberate the country from all evils". The Kuer Sena has its own college and is now agitating for a separate university to be named after Veer Kuer Singh, the legendary hero of the first war of Independence in 1857. According to Chitranjan Singh, one of the founders, the sena is also involved in social service in the area.

The Azad Sena also claims it is primarily engaged in social service. A well-knit group, named after Chandra Shekhar Azad, the famous freedom fighter, it has full-time office-bearers, and its members are young men between the ages of 15 and 35. About its aims, its leader Mohan Dubey says: "We are trying to remove social disparity and fight injustice in a peaceful manner." In addition to running a college called Sanjay Gandhi College, the sena is now in the process of training volunteers, "swayam sevaks" who will work in villages, helping the needy and protecting them from "extremists". Azad Sena members claim they are not casteist at all.

Not all senas claim to be anything other than self-defence units, though. Bir Bahadur Singh, an independent MLA and a rabid anti-Naxalite, once ran his own army because he claimed the police couldn't protect him. He had been arrested under the National Security Act, and there are still some criminal charges pending against him. Recently, at the first ever conference of Bihar Adivasis, held under the leadership of Ram Bilas Paswan of the Janata, and tribal leaders Shiboo Soren and N.E. Horo, it was decided that a "self-respect" movement would be launched this year, along with a "militant Dalit Sena" to spearhead the Dalit movement.

Other senas have had very interesting histories. The Srikrishna Sena is led by a retired army subedar, Ambika Singh, whose property was attached because he once assaulted an inspector. A case was registered against him in this connection. The Samajvadi Krantikari Sena was once led by Mohan Singh, a proclaimed "outlaw".

With such a profusion of senas operating evidently without much hindrance from the police, it appears that the state is passing into the hands of private armies. Unless stricter measures are taken soon, chances are that even murders like that of Prem Chand Sinha will no longer rate any newspaper coverage.

—FARZAND AHMED

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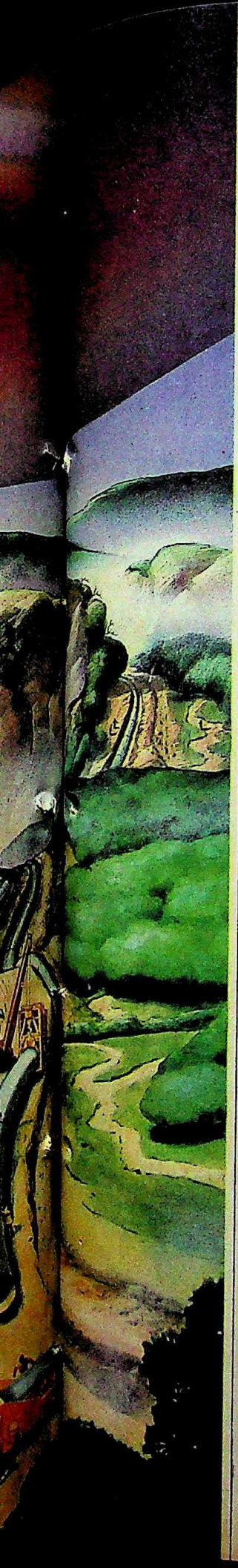
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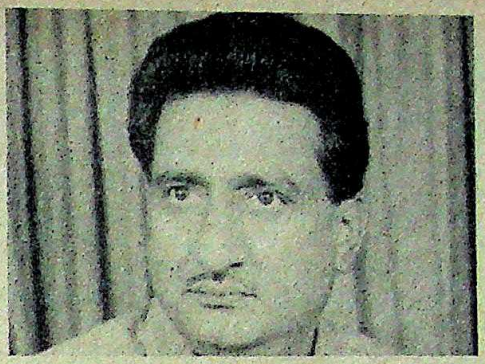
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MADHYA PRADESH

The Long Wait



After five long years, Dr Devidas has finally managed to bring to court members of a contractor's family whom he accuses of murder, as well as three police officers and a civil surgeon whom he charges with covering up the evidence.

A NAYURVEDIC doctor from the steel town of Bhilai has been doggedly pursuing a criminal case for five long years—and has finally managed to bring to court members of a contractor's family whom he accuses of murder, as well as three police officers and a civil surgeon whom he charges with covering up the evidence. Dr Devidas, 48, who describes himself as a social worker and has no direct connection with the case has haunted court after court in his long crusade.

The saga began on the night of November 19, 1978. Abdul Razzak, a driver in his mid-20s, had been employed for nearly five years by a local family of contractors, the Raikas. Late that evening, Durga Prasad Raika and his son Bhagwati Prasad carried a bleeding Razzak to the Sector IX hospital saying that he was vomiting blood. The doctors, however, found a deep cut on Razzak's throat which was responsible for his death. Suspecting foul play, they called the police.

The following day, Dr G.N. Tiwari, assistant surgeon at the Durg district hospital, noted in the post-mortem report that death had been caused due to haemorrhage and shock following an injury by a sharp object. Logically, then, a case of murder should have been registered. What happened instead was that the police suddenly began insisting that while leaning into the jeep engine, Razzak had been accidentally killed by a piece of the fan blade that had broken off.

Dissatisfied that the police were dropping investigation, some local people approached Devidas, who lives in Khursipar, the same locality as the Raikas. Devidas, a member of the Janata Party, filed a series of complaints—to the superintendent of police, Durg, B.P. Dubey, the then inspector general of police, Bhopal, and finally on December 11, he contacted the home secretary.

As a result CID Inspector S.D. Jalganokar was deputed to investigate the case. However, a day before he could begin his research, Durg Civil Surgeon R.S. Shukla had issued a death certificate saying that Razzak had died due to an accident. This certificate, Devidas has alleged in court, was issued to cover up murder. Dr Heereesh Chandra, a top-flight forensic expert, also refused to support the fan-blade accident theory and indicated that it was indeed a case of murder.

On March 7, 1979, three-and-a-half months after Razzak's death, a case of murder and of disturbing evidence was finally registered. Again, after that, there was a lull. Devidas then began moving court after court. He went to the chief judicial magistrate at Durg, to the high court at Jabalpur and finally to the Supreme Court. His intention: to bring to book seven members of the Raika family, Dr Shukla, the then city superintendent of police N.P. Pastaria, inspector Awasthy and sub-inspector Gupta.

In the meantime, R.K. Sharma, an inspector of the CID, submitted a report on March 19, 1982, where he found a prima facie case against all the accused. Following the Supreme Court directive, the Jabalpur High Court delivered its judgement. It said that there was sufficient ground for proceeding against the Raikas for murder while they and the four public servants should also face charges of providing false information to protect the offenders and for disappearance of evidence.

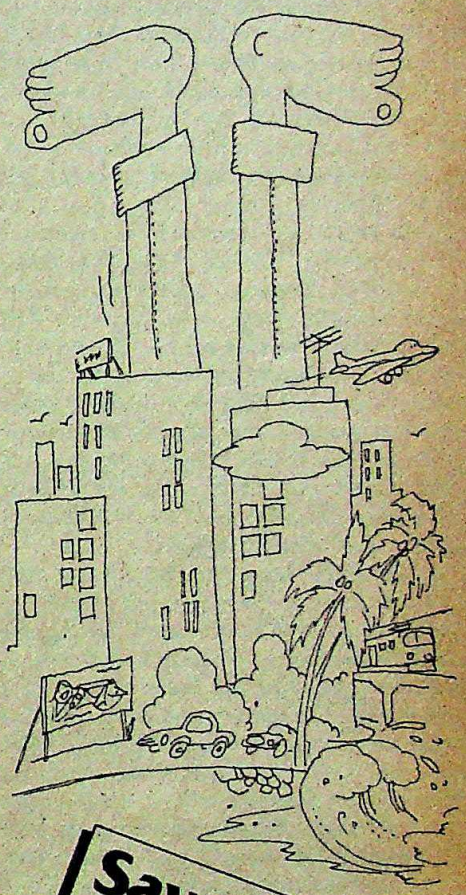
Even then the police did not present the case in court and senior officials in Bhopal merely sat on the high court judgement for 10 months although the investigations were already complete. Only after Devidas assisted Razzak's brother Abdul Jabbar, to bring a writ against the accused, did the state Government shamefacedly give an undertaking to start prosecution. In January 1984, the prosecution was finally launched.

And yet his trials are not over. Shukla, for one, has managed an ex-parte stay. Said Devidas: "Far too often the guilty get away by exerting all kinds of pressures. I never expected the Government to behave the way it did. I'm tired but now that I am in it, I am not going to let the matter rest."

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR in Bhilai

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DAVID ROCKEFELLER

Banking on India

AS FAMILY names go, few can take you farther than that of Rockefeller. And David Rockefeller, chairman of the Chase Manhattan Bank till 1981 and in many senses the continuing "chairman of the American establishment", has travelled constantly round the world, including four times to India—the latest being for a day last fortnight, when he met both Mrs Gandhi and Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee in an effort to get the Government's permission for Chase to open a full-fledged branch in India.

Anthony Sampson, author of a major book on global banks and bankers The Moneylenders *described David Rockefeller, now 68, as the most conventional and industrious of his generation of Rockefellers, shy and podgy as a boy, overawed by the glamour of elder brother Nelson (who became vice-president of the United States), and undistinguished at Harvard other than as a collector of beetles—a continuing hobby.*

After a few years of doing this and that, he joined Chase in 1946, at 31, commuting to Manhattan by New York subway. But he rose quickly in the hierarchy, became chairman in 1969, developed what has been described as a regal style of functioning, and consorted with princes and presidents around the world while becoming a "tireless spokesman both for Chase and for American free enterprise in general". President Nixon offered him the post of secretary of the treasury, which he declined, but he has retained his influence over a succession of presidents.

Under his leadership, Chase also slipped in ranking from the world's largest bank to number three. Since his retirement as chairman of the bank in 1981, he has been chairman of its international advisory committee, replacing Henry Kissinger in a role designed to use the advantage of his name and international connections to further Chase's interests. When he flew into India this time in his private jet accompanied by senior executives, it was to try and get a firmer foothold in what he and other bankers see as an expanding market for their services: Chase alone in 1983 lent or syndicated loans to Indian companies totalling $675 million, including $400 million to the Oil and Natural Gas Commission.

Sampson has described Rockefeller as apt to "make the world sound more boring than it seemed before". When Editor AROON PURIE *and Business Editor* T.N. NINAN *interviewed him in his hotel suite hours before he flew out of the country, he talked without sparkle but in the measured language of a seasoned spokesman.*

Excerpts from the interview:

Q. *A lot of foreign bankers have been coming to India recently. Is there a reason for this?*

A. India has handled its economy extremely well, and I think that India's public attitude has become more favourable towards foreign investment. So bankers feel that this is a place which is more hospitable for doing business. We have had a representative office in India since 1945 but now we would be very happy if the Government of India will permit us to have a branch here.

Q. *Did you apply earlier for opening a branch here?*

A. No. We have talked about this on several occasions before but in the past the policy of the Government of India has been that there should not be more branches of a particular foreign country in India than India had in that country. That policy appears to have been modified to some degree, and they are putting prime emphasis now on what the bank can do to benefit India.

Q. *What would you be able to do more with a branch office than with a representative office?*

A. Particularly in terms of financing trade, we would be able with a staff here to process trade documents in a way that we could not do right now. But also, we would be able to keep more in touch with what's going on, and perform a better job for India. In addition, I think that the very fact of giving a major international bank such as Chase permission at this particular time would be viewed by many potential American investors as a signal that India's policies were being modified and that she was more receptive to foreign investment.

Q. *Did you put this across to the prime minister and finance minister?*

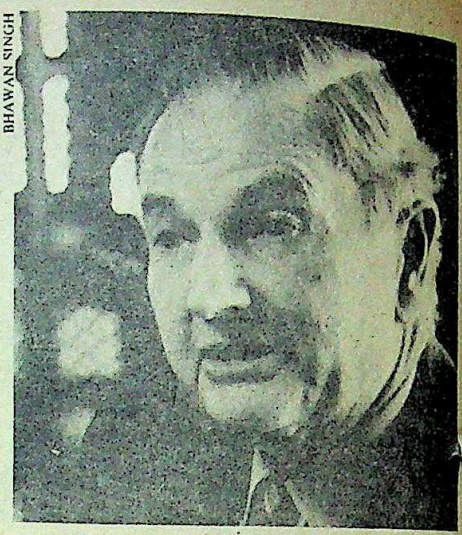
A. We talked with both of them, and both have indicated that the question was being seriously considered.

Q. *Do you really see a large inflow of American investments into India?*

A. My understanding is that the number of applications and approvals in the last year or two has increased considerably.

Q. *There is a school of thought which says that the major international banks move into areas which they consider hot for that particular time, and that they all move in together, almost like a herd. You have examples like Latin America, Poland or Iran. To a large extent it is also backed by international organisations like the* IMF, *who move into these countries, give loans, and then commercial borrowings also start. Do you see it this way now for India?*

BHAWAN SINGH



"India's public attitude has become more favourable towards foreign investment. So bankers feel that this is a place which is more hospitable for doing business."

A. It is obviously true that when countries change their policies or acquire a government which appears to bring economic stability and growth, this attracts the attention of the investors and banks. And I think it is true that the record of India in the last few years has drawn the attention of both bankers and investors to India in a way that has not been true for some time.

Q. *What was the reason for the kind of over-exposure of major banks and the debt crisis that occurred in Latin America? Your own bank was, I think, in Brazil and Mexico?*

A. We made enormous loans not only in Brazil and Mexico but also in Argentina and most of the other countries, at a time when their economies were growing rapidly. But the second oil shock came along and brought a severe world-wide recession. Along with this you had very high interest rates and declining commodity prices which went against the countries which you are speaking of. All these combined to create a liquidity crisis and the countries concerned found themselves no longer able to pay the very high cost of servicing or financing their debt.

It is easy to say in retrospect that they should not have sought to borrow so much and that the banks should have loaned less but I think one has to also take into account that the facts that I have described were not anticipated.

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Q. Was there also over-enthusiasm or competition among the banks to sell, in a way to oversell? The reports are that people were not even checking out collaterals properly.

A. We could not predict what was going to happen. I am not going to say that everybody was an archangel on both sides. But it is a lot easier to be critical with hindsight.

Q. What is the lesson you learnt from this experience?

A. One lesson that is not referred to these days is that the commercial banking system in the world was able to deal with a shock of a magnitude we had never seen before, with remarkable ease. From 1973 when the first oil shock began until 1979, there was a recycling of funds in a way that avoided many crises. It was only when the second oil shock hit, which in a way was even tougher because people were in less good shape, that one felt the impact more particularly.

But we also learnt that short-term money was being extended to replenish longer-term loans and agencies that collect information on this did not have up to date information on the short-term loans. Now a group of major international banks have got together and formed a clearing house of information so that from now on, hopefully, there would be more accurate information.

Q. Would it be a fair comment to say that the banks have got off lightly from the debt crisis, whereas the countries that are in it have to pay a much heavier price as it turns out? Also that the banks in fact benefit from rescheduling loans because they can then charge higher interest rates?

A. I would think that the bank would clearly prefer that debts are paid promptly in accordance with the loan.

Q. Do you think the world financial community would ever let a country, in however bad shape it might be, go into default? And if it did, because of the interdependence you talked about, would it create very serious problems?

A. That is a situation we would try to avoid.

Q. You did once declare Iran in default.

A. I think it is interesting to point out in connection with Iran and the freezing of their assets and so on once again that there were crises that all the international banks were going to go bankrupt because they would lose all those billions of dollars. In fact we had zero losses from Iran. I just think that the public and the media get exaggerated views. They blow up these things as though it were a disaster and then, when it is dealt with, not only have they forgotten about it but also the fact that it has been dealt with.

Q. Getting back to Iran do you find that your friendship with the Shah of Iran in any way put the bank's reputation of neutrality into question?

A. Well, we got paid.

Q. But is it true that Chase was an object of hostility from the new government of Iran?

A. When we negotiated the final settlement they never raised the question.

Q. Was the taking of hostages in the US Embassy in Teheran linked to your efforts to get the Shah into the US?

A. They had threatened to overrun the embassy and this was the reason that President Carter said that the Shah was no longer welcome. In other words he responded to blackmail, I would say. A few people who had worked with him felt this was not a very nice way to treat somebody who had worked with six presidents over 25 years and helped him first to get to the Bahamas and then go to Mexico.

Q. And then you were helped bring him into the US in a Rockefeller plane?

A. No, he was loaned a plane by Mexico. We were told that the Shah was ill, so we gave this information to the State Department which sent down their chief doctor. The President of the US then took the decision to let him in.

Q. Being a friend of the Shah, what do you think led to his downfall?

A. I think it is a fact that he had somewhat lost touch with what was going on in the country. He didn't listen to the advice of people in certain things he didn't want to hear. I also think the withdrawal of US support was not inconsequential.

Q. You think the US should have supported him?

A. Well, let me put it this way. I think for the people of Iran and for the rest of the world they were better off under the Shah than they are under the present regime.

Q. How do you view President Reagan's not too sympathetic attitude towards the World Bank, IDA and the IMF?

A. It is true that when he came to office Reagan personally and his Administration in general took a rather negative view of these international agencies. I think the President has changed his view very considerably in the meantime because I think he has seen that they play a very important role which is beneficial to the US as well as the rest of the world. The President personally lobbied for the IMF fund increase a year before it was passed by Congress. For IDA I think the Administration has taken a less strong stand. I personally disagree with that. I think we should have given more rather than less. I think this was a wrong assessment of what was in the US interest.

Q. Do you think the cutbacks on IDA lending are helping commercial banks like yours, in that countries which do not get aid now are forced to come to you instead?

A. I think these are different markets for lending.

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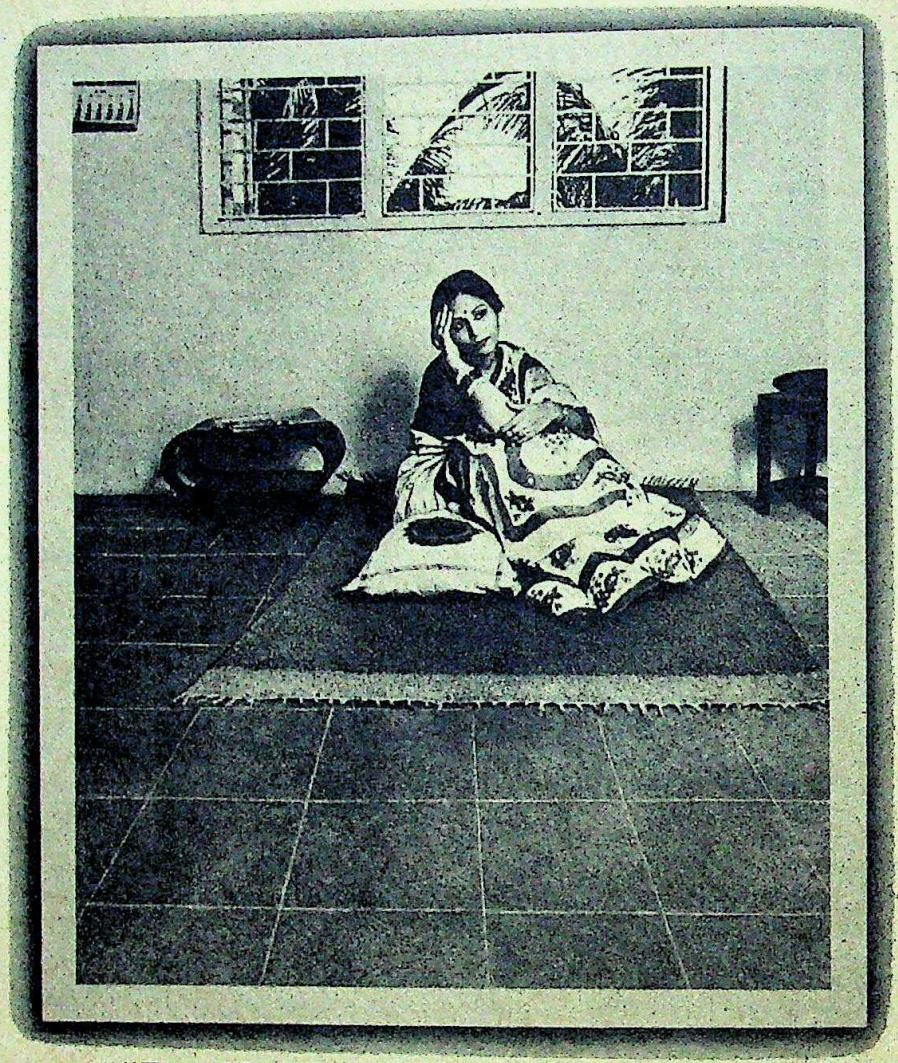
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Dated: 1st March 1984

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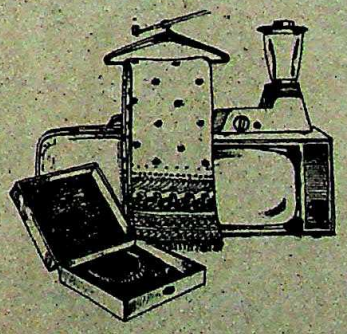
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POPULATION

Losing on Numbers



UNICEF/T.S. SATYAN

IN CHINA, one applies for formal permission to have a second child. In Indonesia, the family planning worker comes around the village, rings the doorbell and hands the woman her regular pill. In Japan, where *Choto Mate* (just-a-minute hotels, which charge by the hour) are an institution, the condom is the in thing. Most Asian countries—whether left, right or centre—are engaged, one way or another, in a stiff battle against their own numbers—already far above a staggering 2,500 million.

To take stock of this fast-increasing problem, a Rs 2 million jamboree of parliamentarians from Asian countries was sponsored by five UN organisations in New Delhi last fortnight. The meet, on Population and Development, turned out to be a rather tame affair, with a predictable series of long-winded speeches.

The conference did serve as a forum for a slanging match between the political ranks of the host country—the spark being provided by Mrs Gandhi's remark in her inaugural address that the Opposition had made a political issue of the family planning programme. But on the subject of how various countries were coping with their population problems, very little was said.

Very little, too, was said about the magnitude of the problem that faces India. For the past 20 years, the birth rate has been fixed and refixed at 25 per 1,000. Yet, the goal, which was set in 1963 for 1973, has still not been achieved.

According to present targets, by 2000 A.D., the birth rate is to be reduced to 21, the death rate to 9 and the infant mortality rate to 60 per 1,000 and the average life span is to increase to 64 years. Today, 16 years from



Newborn babies lined up in a hospital and Mrs Gandhi at the conference: lack of system

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the deadline, the birth rate stands at 32.6 per 1,000, the death rate at 13.6, the infant mortality rate at 127 and the average life span is 51.6 years.

Probably the most daunting target is the 60 per cent couple protection (the number of couples covered by the programme) set for 2000 A.D. So far only 26 per cent of the 120 million couples in the reproductive age group have been covered by the family planning programme. Complicating this problem is the fact that the number of couples is likely to rise to 170-180 million by the end of the century.

In the past few years, India has never achieved its targets. Though the country has improved achievement of targets from 37.4 per cent in 1978-79 to 88 per cent last year, India is nowhere near the levels of achievement of many of its neighbours. A number of other Asian countries are far ahead on the road to solving their population problems.

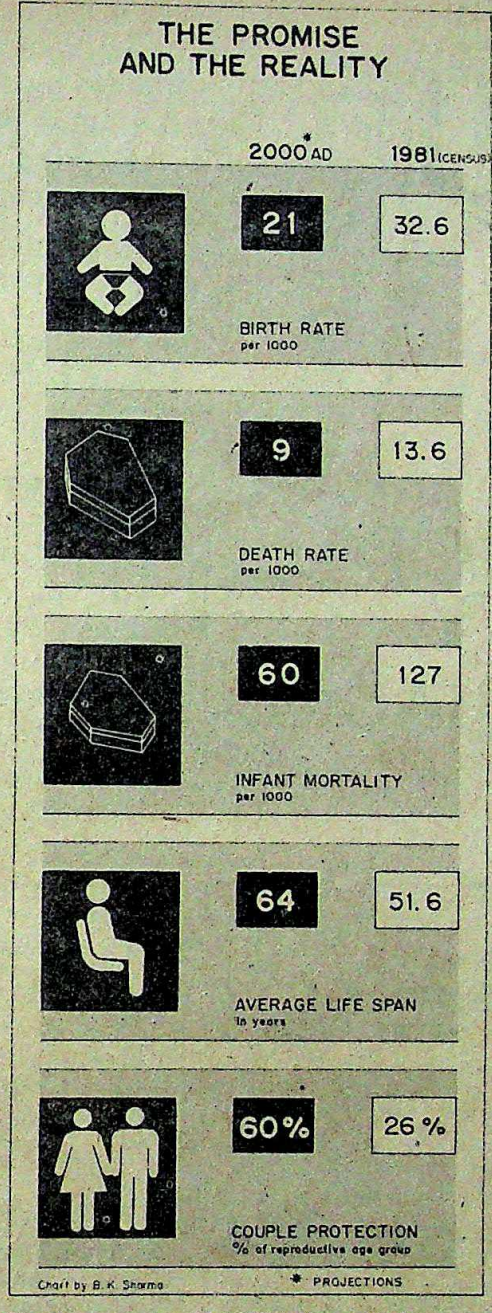
China, for example, has brought down its birth rate from 38 per 1,000 in 1970 to 20 in 1980. (It took India 16 years to reduce its birth rate by half as much—from 41 in 1966 to 32 in 1982.) China has already achieved 70 per cent couple protection, while India's target of 60 per cent by 2000 A.D. seems but a distant dream.

It is often said that China is not a comparable example because of the political system and its recent decision to enforce the one-child family norm. However, Rami Chhabra of the Family Planning Foundation, headed by J.R.D. Tata, feels that India has much to learn from its neighbour. "The coercion element has crept in now. But there has been a consistent emphasis on involving the community and provision of basic developmental services like primary health care, sanitation and clean water," she says.

Different population targets are set up for each district and community leaders discuss with each family whether or not they may have a child. As the President of the China Population Association, Xu Dixing, says: "Permission to have second births is given to the married couples who were themselves the only child of the one-child family and exceptions are made in the light of different circumstances, different localities and for areas inhabited by minorities."

Chhabra says that it is not the strict one-child family norm that India needs to adopt —the system has inherent dangers, e.g. the increasing female infanticide in China—but the highly organised system. Among the attractive benefits and incentives offered in China is a scheme by which a mother is given a certain sum for every month that she doesn't conceive a second child until her first reaches a certain age.

K. Srinivasan, director of the International Institute of Population Studies at



Bombay agrees with Chhabra. "What we offer is compensation for the days of work lost and not incentives," he says. "Instead of giving states amounts of Rs 1 crore each, give them recognition. But the real incentive must go to the acceptor," he insists.

In Indonesia too, incentives are a major part of the strategy. Indonesia's representative at the conference, Minister for Transmigration Martono, explains: "In addition to salaries, we give family allowances for children. But irrespective of the size of the family, a man will not get allowance for more than two children. To farmers, we give a coconut tree for each child. And for a community that has performed well, we build a church or a mosque or a temple, depending on the religion being practised."

An important feature of the Indonesian programme is its careful planning. Detailed maps of each district indicate the contraceptive methods used by each family. People wear blue or green ribbons to family planning meetings depending on the method they use. Srinivasan says: "If we could even learn from them the organisational methodology, it would help a great deal. We don't even have a proper birth and registration system."

Experts are increasingly promoting an integrated approach to population control. Dingri Banda, parliamentary secretary in Sri Lanka, points out that the "high level of female literacy has helped push the programme forward" in his country. This theory is borne out by the example of Kerala the most literate of Indian states which at 25.2 per 1,000 has the lowest birth rate in the country.

Kerala also has the lowest infant mortality rate—42 per 1,000. At the other extreme, Uttar Pradesh, with the higest birth rate (40.4 per 1,000), has the highest infant mortality rate (an appalling 177 per 1,000).

There is a growing awareness the world over of the psychological impact of child mortality on mothers. A UNICEF pamphlet distributed at the conference—which perhaps only a few parliamentarians leafed through —quoted 13-year-old Faye Ayertey from Ghana. Faye says: "My parents will choose my husband. I will have children right away. I will have ten children because maybe some will die. I want children to help me with my housework and when I am old, they will bring me more money."

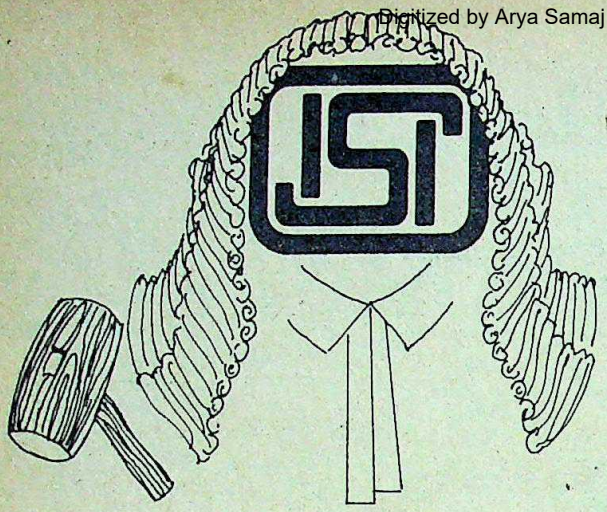
The voice could easily be Indian. With an infant mortality rate of 127 per 1,000, Indian experts recognise the need to battle the problem vigorously, conscious that China and Sri Lanka have proved that despite low per capita income, the problem can be tackled. But they recognise that if targets are to be achieved, for the expectancy—and quality—of life to be improved, targets too must be realistically fixed and relentlessly persued. "What we need is to set the family norm of two children and work towards that. The method of contraception is important but secondary," says Srinivasan. Even if the two-child norm is achieved by the end of the century, it would be a miracle; but we are still talking in terms of *do ya teen*.

The emphasis of family planning, he feels, will have to shift in the future from sterilisation to spacing of children, particularly among young couples. According to Srinivasan: "In the country viewed as a whole, the potential reserve of couples who can be sterilised is nearly exhausted."

In any case, experts feel that sterilisation, in the long run, may not be as effective as the spacing of births. Most Indian couples tend to have as many children as they want and then go in for sterilisation. The concept of spacing births is virtually ignored.

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But experts point out that the use of a contraceptive device by one woman in her twenties for just one year is twice as effective for population control as the sterilisation of two women around the age of 40. To reach the targets set for 2000 A.D., for example, experts plan to increase sterilisations from the 2.2 lakh targeted for 1982-83 to 66.1 lakh by the end of the century. But the number of IUD insertions are to be increased fourfold from 15 lakh to 66.1 lakh.

Meanwhile, the emphasis continues to be on sterilisation—which is popular among women. When the programme began, there was one tubectomy (female sterilisation) for every four vasectomies (male sterilisations). Today this ratio is reversed.

But progress is hampered by insufficient resources. Though the budget for family planning has increased from Rs 15 lakh in the First Five-Year Plan to Rs 1,567 crore in the sixth, the per capita expenditure on family planning is still no more than Rs 3 a year.

In the next few years, 5-6 million new couples will have to be covered under the programme every year until the ultimate target of maintaining the total number of women in the reproductive age group at a constant is achieved, possibly by 2000 A.D. The Indian population is expected to finally stabilise with a zero growth rate by 2050 A.D. But even for that to happen, most parts of the country have a long march ahead.

—PRABHA DUTT

INTERVIEW

"I am hopeful"

DESPITE the apparent inactivity on the family planning front, things do seem to be moving at last. Last fortnight Health Minister B. Shankaranand revealed that a scheme estimated at Rs 4,000 crore—a considerable step forward from the Rs 1,567-crore allowance for family planning in the sixth plan budget—has been formulated that provides a continuous benefit to families who limit their children to two. Also for the first time, it would be possible for government hospitals and family planning clinics to sterilise men or women with only one child. Excerpts from an interview with Principal Correspondent PRABHA DUTT.



Shankaranand: unabashed optimism

Q. How far do you think the family planning programme has progressed?

A. We are doing fairly well. From 5.5 million acceptors in 1979-80, we went up to 11.1 million acceptors in 1982-83. Till January this year we have covered 10.3 million and the total number of acceptors, we hope, will go up to 13 million by the end of the financial year.

Q. But that figure was achieved seven years ago and the population has gone up considerably since then.

A. After coming back to the 1976 level in 1982, last year for the first time the graph showed an increase of 2.2 per cent. This year we hope it will go up further by 2.4 per cent. The best indicator of the success of the programme is indeed the couple protection. Couple protection means not only sterilisation, but protection through all family planning methods. We are now going to emphasise the spacing method. One aspect which could not receive enough attention was delayed marriage. By educating people about the penal provisions of violating the marriage age—18 for girls and 21 for boys—I am hoping to convert the people.

Q. Do you think state governments are really going to penalise people for getting married earlier?

A. Mere penal provisions will not succeed. I hope to achieve things through mass education of the younger generation.

Q. With only 27 million couples protected and another 69 million still to be covered, can the target be met by the year 2000 deadline?

A. I agree we have to tackle more couples every year instead of merely covering the couples in the reproductive age group added to the population every year. But I am hopeful. In 1981, the proportion of children in the age group of 0 to 9 years has shown a downward trend as compared to 1971. This is a heartening sign. Of the 400 districts in the country, 92 have attained couple protection of 30 per cent and 60 districts have reached a couple protection of 36 per cent—the target for 1985.

Q. It has been estimated that twice the investment that is being made for the family planning programme is needed to achieve its targets.

A. We have to get more by way of resource input. Finance should not be a problem and we are still estimating what we will need. For one scheme alone we have set aside Rs 4,000 crore.

Q. Are you thinking in terms of better and continuous incentives for acceptors instead of a lump sum compensation as is given today?

A. This scheme will be aimed more at women, giving them a certain amount till the children reach a certain age.

Q. What is being done to push the two-child family norm? Hospitals have been instructed not to sterilise a man or a woman with one child and even not to sterilise them for a period of three years after the second child. Why is there still talk of "teesra baccha abhi nahin"?

A. We do have requests from states that as a national policy we should announce a one-child family norm. But we have to go slow, stabilise ourselves. I do agree when there are specific requests to sterilise men or women with even one child. After discussing with the state governments we will remove the blanket ban. Our slogan now is "*teesra baccha kabhi nahin*".

Q. One of the main reasons for the failure of the programme is said to be the lack of an integrated approach.

A. On the contrary, our very first plan started with the concept of population control and development. In 1982 we even set up a coordinating committee with officials from the education, labour and social welfare ministries. I am its chairman. If you see the growth rate of the country's five-year plans, you will see family planning and development have gone more or less hand in hand.

Q. Would you say then that both have progressed very slowly?

A. Look at the performance of countries around us. Pakistan has a population growth rate of 3 per cent and Bangladesh 2.8 per cent.

Q. But Sri Lanka has a population growth rate of 1.7 per cent.

A. Proximity-wise we have the examples of Kerala and Tamil Nadu who have done equally well.

Q. Considering the enormity of the problem and the backlogs in the target achievement, would you not say that time is running out?

A. The *World Watch* journal has, for the first time, said that India's family planning programme is back on the rails. We are trying to catch up with time.

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MAHABALESHWAR

Threatened Resort

THE RESIDENTS of Mahabaleshwar and neighbouring Panchgani are fighting a determined rearguard action to keep out a horde of building developers and businessmen trying to buy land in the two towns. If the builders have their way, Mahabaleshwar will be double its present size in the next few years ruining its small resort character. The developers have got around strict municipal laws by buying up agricultural land along the 19 km Mahabaleshwar-Panchgani highway.

In the last few years Mahabaleshwar has become a popular tourist resort for people fleeing the bustle of Bombay. Last year about 2.2 lakh people visited the town. But strict municipal laws, which, amongst other things, prohibit plots smaller than 2 acres prevented anyone from buying property and the population of Mahabaleshwar stayed steady at 14,000.

However,what nobody anticipated was that the builders would buy up agricultural land on either side of the 19 km stretch from Mahabaleshwar to Panchgani and exploit lax regulations to get permission to use it for non-agricultural (NA) purposes. In the last few years there have been 1,545 cases where such permission has been granted covering a total of 121.5 hectares. Of this 25 hectares are along the highway. This will almost exactly double the size of Mahabaleshwar and Panchgani since the two hill stations between them have only 1,540 houses at the moment.

It is not just land developers and builders who are moving to Mahabaleshwar. A number of big businessmen with diverse business interests are also buying. They have all advertised their proposed plans for flats and plots with fanciful names like Shangri-la and Dreamlands on big billboards near Mahabaleshwar Lake along the highway. The billboards enticingly offers: "Just Rs 1,250 a month in instalments." The response has been swift. Says Amir Nensey, promoter of three schemes: "My projects were booked up within three months."

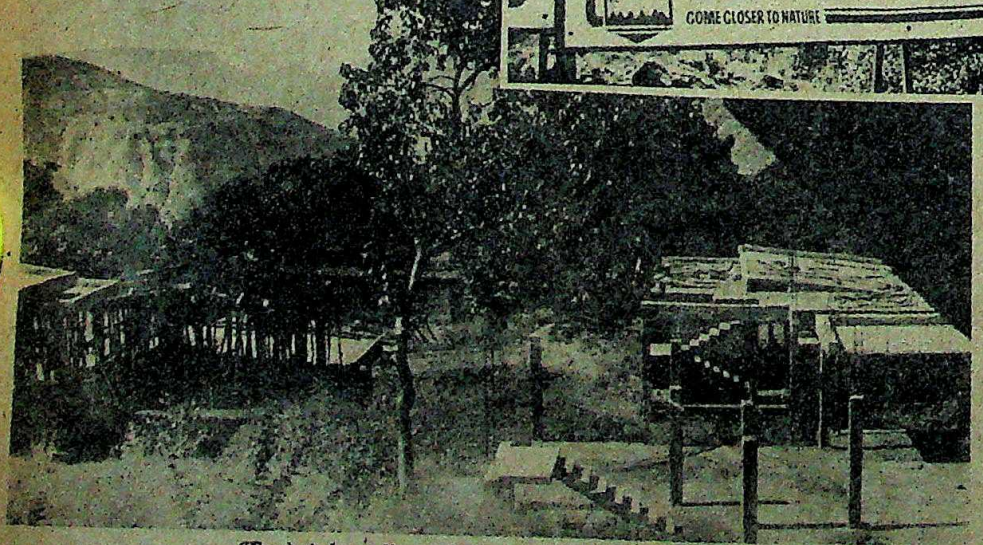
Inevitably the residents are worried about the effects of the building boom. The new tribe of builders are parcelling out land in small plots of 278 sq m. And since they are selling smaller plots, prices have shot up more than 10 times. Agricultural land selling for Rs 5,000 to Rs 10,000 an acre a few years ago is now being parcelled out after development of Rs 15,000 for 3,000 sq ft. In Mahabaleshwar prices are higher but there are few sellers.

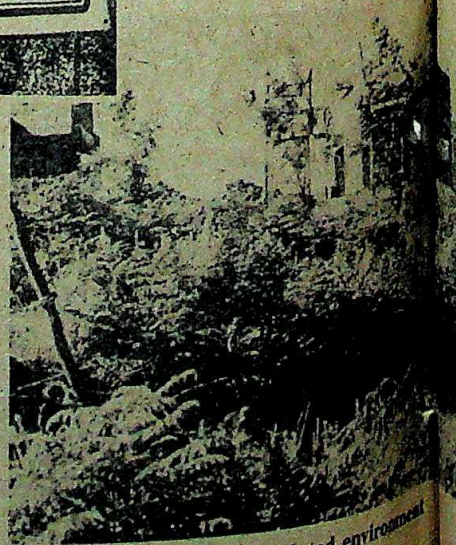
The new developers of the area however, have no such worries about the environment. They are managing to cut through the red tape with an ease that is annoying local residents. Says Mehroom Boga, president of the Save Mahabaleshwar and Panchgani Association: "It took me three and-a-half months to get permission for a small extension to my farmhouse whereas the new developers are getting en masse clearance overnight." Chand Dange, a villager from Nakinda, says that while he was refused permission to build his small hut just a few yards off the main road to Kate's Point, a developer got permission for 108 flats just off the road in the same locality. Says Shiraz Satarwalla, another member of the association: "The problem was that there was no coordination between the various sanctioning authorities located at Wai Satara and Mahabaleshwar. There was no senior government servant in Mahabaleshwar and NA's were being sold."

Government organisations have also joined in the free-for-all, and have started constructing without official sanction. The Central Railway built 12 cottages and a septic tank without municipal clearance, the government dairy extended its premises without permission, and the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation built 12 deluxe suites and cut down a large number of trees without any sanction.

Illegal tree felling is an old problem around Mahabaleshwar. Residents are worried that the spate of constructions will upset the ecological balance of the district. Environmentalists say that the lush undergrowth which protected the soil is now thinner. A government report on "Saving Mahabaleshwar's Environment" by N.D. Jayal, joint secretary of the Department of Environment, warned: "Land speculation outside the municipal limits will be at the cost of private forests and agricultural land. Unless it is checked now the entire plateau may well be destroyed within a decade and rendered unfit for habitation.







(Top) A hoarding advocates 'land grab' and (above) evidences of an unsightly construction race: vitiated environment

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AND THERE are crucial reasons why the environment of the area must be preserved. The plateau serves as the catchment area for five rivers and three major dam reservoirs—the Koyna, the Warna and the Kanhere—all constructed from and the plateau. Increased deforestation could lead to heavy silting of the river which will have a disastrous effect.

Under the revised draft plan more forest is going to vanish, as the land earmarked for residential purposes has been tripled from 1,605 hectares to 507 hectares. The Panchgani municipal area development plan proposes that residential land should be increased from 60 hectares to 171 hectares. Another suggestion is for plot sizes and FSI's to be reduced for certain categories.

One man in Ranjanwadi village is said to have cut down hundreds of trees on eight acres of private land. He denies it but Anees Wood, a member of the Save Mahabaleshwar and Panchgani Association, points out that "the fact that the trees were cut from only one mile from the main market and that the sound of the cutting could be heard for miles around suggests that there is a complete breakdown of authority".

It was only last year that some residents realised that the building activity seriously threatened their town. They at once organised a campaign against the building and sent hundreds of postcards to Mrs Gandhi. She took an interest in the matter and wrote to the Government demanding a strict check on commercial building activity.

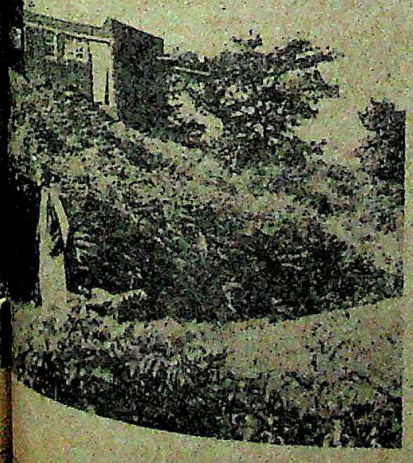
Following the prime minister's letter, Minister of State for Environment Vijay Singh also took up the matter. A little later Governor Idris Hasan Latif and Chief Secretary R.D. Nayak paid a visit. Things then started to move rapidly. A special additional collector was posted exclusively for the Mahabaleshwar tehsil and a regional planning body was set up. The area around Mahabaleshwar Lake which had more vendors, billboards and video games than Chowpatty beach was cleared up. Permission to build new hotels was frozen and steps were taken to prevent illegal felling. Says Shyam Chainani, secretary of the Bombay Environmental Action Group: "The various actions taken by the authorities in Mahabaleshwar could act as a trendsetter for other hill stations all over the country particularly if our remaining demands are implemented."

One of the most controversial decisions by the authorities is to cancel NA permissions to at least 16 sites. This has caused considerable panic among the developers. Sadruddin Daya, owner of the Dawood Shoe Company who has received a cancellation notice for his scheme to develop 25 acres along the Mahabaleshwar-Panchgani road, describes the notice as "totally frivolous". Daya says that he plans to appeal to the commissioner as no valid reason is given for the cancellation and he has already spent over Rs 5 lakh for the development of the land. If his appeal fails he will go to court. Many other developers are also thinking along similar lines. They say that some customers have already made the necessary payments.

Amir Nensey gained prominence early this year for his involvement in a Bombay deal for converting 240 acres of a green belt in Goregaon into an amusement park, Disneyland style. He bought this land at an absurdly low price from a charitable trust and prefers to keep a low profile even though one of his schemes has been cancelled. Nensey says he hopes the Government will adopt a reasonable approach. "To buy a flat for Rs 1 lakh is beyond the hope of most of the middle class and I am offering it in instalments." While appreciating Government's attitude on environment, Nensey feels that the cancellation stand should be taken only in regard to future schemes. "After all with the existing schemes less than 1 per cent of the area will be affected," he says.

Residents, however, insist that there is another major snag in the new development projects. The developers have not informed their purchasers of the acute water scarcity in many of the projects. In the last three years the Central Lake has dried up so rapidly that it would not be practical to depend on it for future supply. The water supply has reached the limit of its capacity with many smaller hotels constantly filling up tankers from the lake and last year in summer some strawberry fields wilted for lack of water. But such considerations are unlikely to dampen the enthusiasm of the builders who are merrily going ahead with their efforts to turn the resort into an environmental nightmare.

—COOMI KAPOOR in Mahabaleshwar

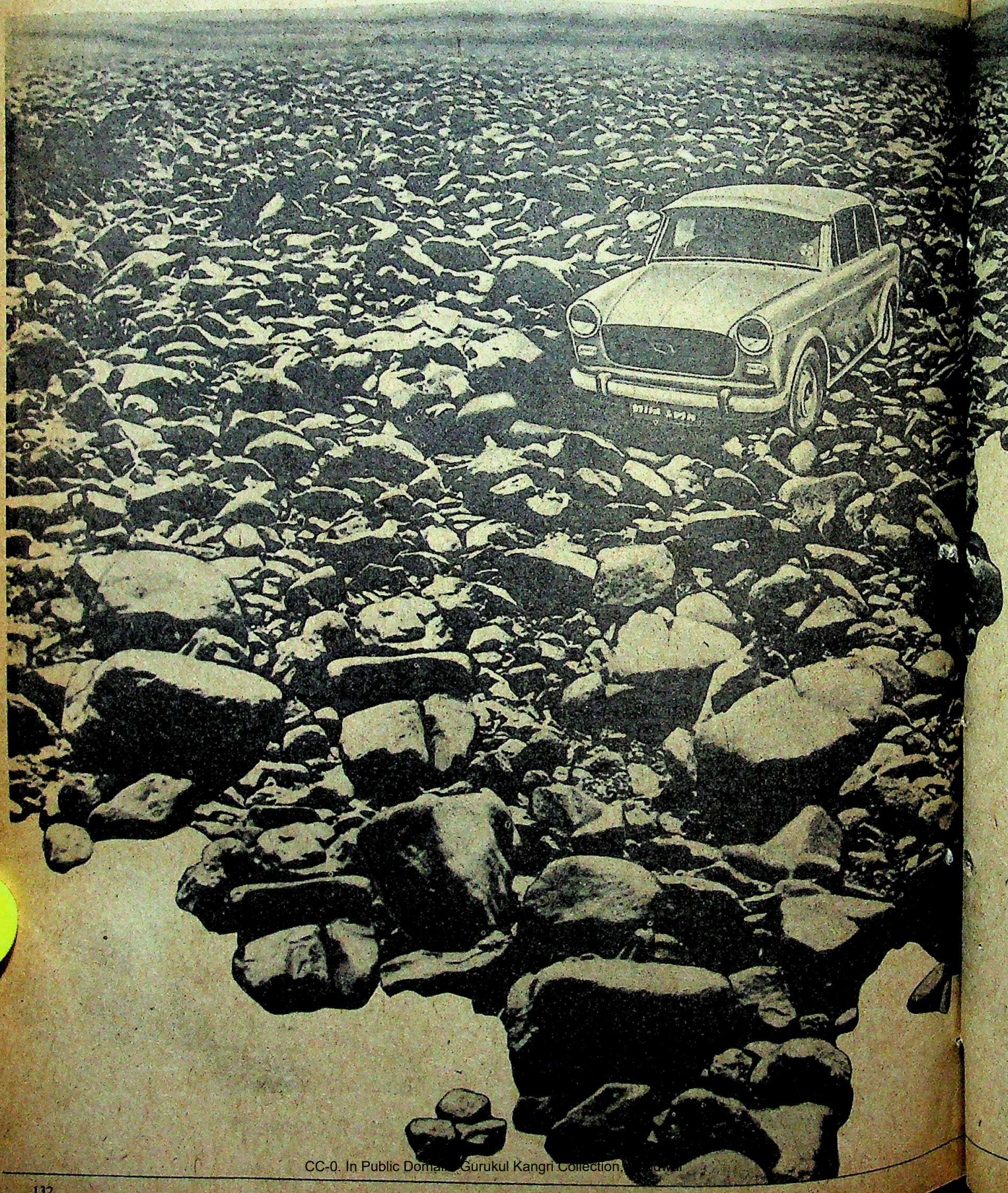




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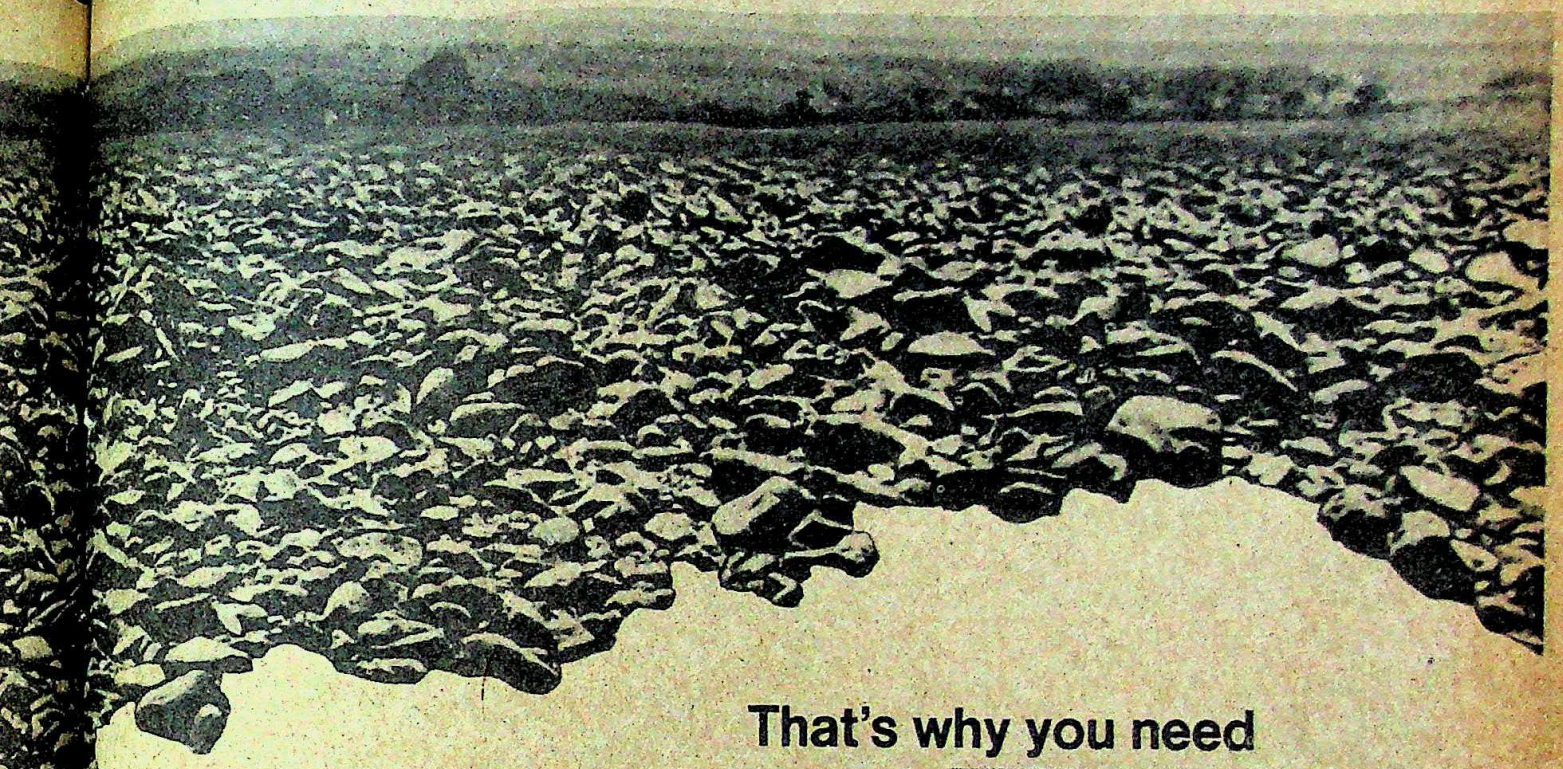
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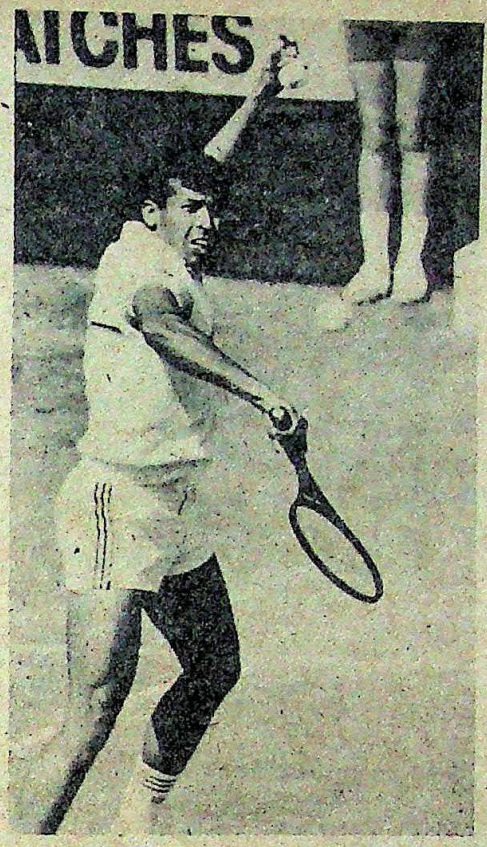
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Noah (left) and Menon: one-sided fight

NNIS

French Finesse

THE LAST time he was in India six years ago, Yannick Noah was just beginning to make his presence felt on nis courts. Today the 24-year-old whom thur Ashe discovered in Africa over a cade ago is ranked fifth in the world and is t of the tennis jet-set. He made that amply ar last fortnight when he purred his way und the main court of the Delhi Lawn nis Association to lead France to an easy tory in the India-France Davis Cup tie in w Delhi. Noah began by brushing nesh Krishnan's weak serves and weaker rns to notch up a straight sets win, ned up with Henri Leconte to swat aside nd Amritraj and Sashi Menon, and finis- with another pantherish performance inst Anand Amritraj.

The only consolation for India was that enon, replacing a still convalescing Krish- defeated an erratic Leconte by two sets one in the first of the reverse singles. The spoken question was whether Menon, h his consistently accurate serving and siderably stronger returns, would not e been a better choice than a Krishnan y Amritraj said in a television interview: hi played to a plan: he got his serves in pressured Leconte where it mattered."

India began as underdogs and matters became worse when Vijay Amritraj returned from Memphis with a ruptured pectoral muscle. Pain-killing injections during a quick dash to Madras did not help. Before the match Vijay said in private that "it is a fifty-fifty chance whether I'll play". On the day of the draw, he was at the practice courts early, but it was soon obvious that it would be murder to swing a racquet. As coach Narender Singh said gloomily afterwards: "The forehand was simply not functioning."

In that context, the defeat was inevitable, although the Indian captain did make brave noises about home crowds and grass courts—the French are brought up on hard surfaces and there was speculation that they would find it difficult to adjust to grass. French Captain Jean-Paul Loth said: "If this tie was held in France, I'd immediately say that the score would be 5-0. Here, I'll only say that we have the better players." That the score was still 4-1 is a measure of India's tennis bankruptcy.

Never was that bankruptcy more evident than in the Leconte-Anand encounter. Leconte is ranked 29th on the ATP computer and Anand is nowhere in the rankings but that Friday afternoon Leconte seemed to be doing his best to lose. He double-faulted no less than 23 times—once, he lost an entire game this way, reeling off four double-faults in a row—and in the fourth and last set, lost his service game twice. Still he won, passing Anand again and again on both sides with contemptuous ease, sending a dozen aces scorching over the grass.

But it was the Noah-Krishnan tussle that made France's superiority blindingly clear. Krishnan was admittedly weak after a bout of fever—Vijay said that Krishnan would have played 80 per cent better if he had been fit—but even that 80 per cent might not have been enough. In his 14 service games Krishnan could not score more than one point in 12 games. He had no reply to Noah's 13 service aces. His strength is his ability to place the ball and he displayed this to cheers quite a few times, but Noah covers ground so quickly that even this advantage was lost.

Noah and Leconte are the pride of the French tennis renaissance, which peaked in 1982 when France reached the finals of the Davis Cup after nearly half-a-century. Philippe Chatrier, president of the International Tennis Federation and the French Tennis Federation, gives the reason: "We started 15 years ago to train hundreds of players through a systematic process of coaching all over France. For 10 years nothing happened. Suddenly we struck gold in this generation—Noah, Leconte. We spend anything between S1 million and S2 million a year on tennis. But I must emphasise that no system can produce a champion. What we can do is to make sure that every talent in a country is discovered and helped."

India, of course, lags far behind in such matters. Says Vijay: "One guy a decade is just not enough. You must have a better organisation. I would appoint four coaches for four zones, pick up eight juniors from each zone, review their development after three months, pick the eight best, give them two months of additional training, then send them abroad for tournament experience. Three years of this and I'm sure we'll have a Wimbledon junior champion."

Meanwhile, India is struggling with talent famine. In the last Masters, for instance, only one out of the 16 players was an Indian. What is more, the steady trickle of top drawer players to India in the mid-'70s appears to have dried up. As coach Akhtar Ali says: "We have not done anything for the last six or seven years." Unless the powers of Indian tennis get down to it in right earnest, they will suffer more drubbings of the kind handed out by the quick-moving men from France.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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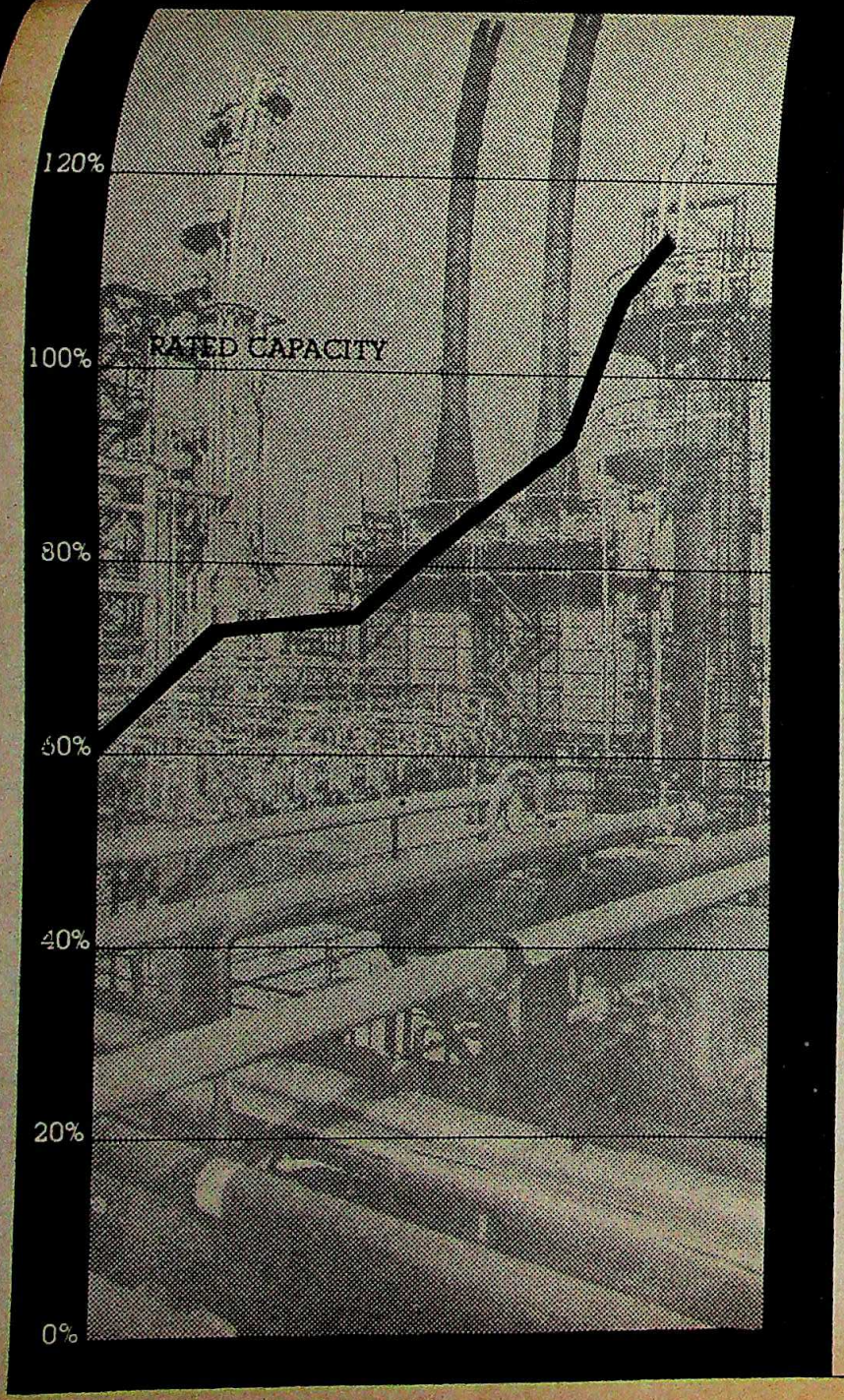
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CHESS

Stalemate

SHE IS short, stout and studious—and devastating. Maya Cheburdonidze, 22, twice world women's chess champion was in Delhi last fortnight showing 11 male rivals and an assortment of spectators what a champion player is made of. As the second Bhilwara International Grandmasters Chess Tournament—prize money Rs 40,000—swung into its second week Maya led a field that included five Indian international masters and three grandmasters by a clear half point. On the way, she had convincingly beaten Indian National Champion Pravin Thipsay, who is rated nearly 50 points ahead of her. Said Maya: "Some men do resent playing women in tournaments, but if we continue to score points it doesn't bother us."

Maya's presence in Delhi was something of a coup for Indian chess, but as the fortnight-long tourney wore on in the hushed concert hall of the Soviet Cultural Centre, it was increasingly apparent that the blessing was mixed. After years of being an also ran in world chess—until the mid-'70s, International Master Manuel Aaron was the lone Indian representative in international chess—India now boasts six international masters and is looking for its first grandmaster. However, to attain the grandmaster norm at Bhilwara, a player would have to score 8.5 points, a herculean challenge with the presence of stalwarts like Maya and Russian grandmasters Eduard Gufeld—Maya's coach—and Gennady Kuzmin, not to speak of Bulgarian grandmaster Liuben Spassov.

The Indians were consequently guarded about their prospects. "People today expect an Indian grandmaster overnight," said Ravisekhar, a veteran of over 20 international tournaments. The exclusivity of the title can be understood from the fact that Asia has only three grandmasters out of the 150-odd in the world—over half of these from the Soviet Union. Two years ago, at the first Bhilwara tournament, there was speculation that Dibyendu Barua, 18, might make the grade, but the second made it amply clear that he has to work harder. Says International Master Parameswaran: "Barua has to study chess theory more deeply." Barua himself comments wryly: "Often I wish I were free to play my own game, and people would not expect so much of me."

The Indian who everyone agrees has most chances of making it to the coveted title is Thipsay. Thipsay is a fighter who has developed into a strong player over the last few years. Says Ravikumar: "In one way Thipsay is superior to all of us, and that is his sheer courage. He fights hard, even against the strongest grandmasters and is willing to take risks." Last fortnight, however, the national champion appeared to have had his confidence shaken by his loss to Maya having earlier lost in London to Pia Camling, the highest rated woman in the world. "For now," he says cautiously, "we have to continue to work hard and grab the maximum chances for international exposure."

Work hard they might, but the players lament that chess receives little encouragement from the Government. "If Indian players have done well, the credit goes to them and their employers," says Ravisekhar, and cites how he won the Asian circuit in 1979 entirely on his own, at times going to a tournament on the gamble that he would win a prize and be able to buy his return fare. Adds candidate master D.V. Prasad: "The Government does foot the bill for major tournaments but expenses are considerable abroad and have to be borne by us." And it doesn't help when states like Maharashtra refuse to recognise chess as a sport eligible for the usual financial grants.

What is more remarkable is that most Indian chess experts have developed without the benefit of coaching. Gufeld who is considered to be one of the Soviet Union's leading coaches, emphasises: "Coaching is essential for a chess player whatever his playing strength." His student Maya explains that "we follow a system based on deep theoretical and practical preparation. Psychological training is also important. Understanding of one's character and that of one's opponent is a vital ingredient."

That is an understatement. Chess is an industry in the Soviet Union; Bobby Fischer once called Soviet players robots and he was not far off the mark. Although the Soviets are notoriously tight-lipped about their chess programme, some facets do filter out: days before a major tournament, for example, the clocks in a player's quarters are reportedly to the time of the set venue—anywhere in the world—and the player will sleep, eat and practise by the new time. Out of a team of 12, say, that goes for a competition, six will be psychologists who will 'motivate' the players and analyse their opponents' state of mind. The physical preparation is as rigorous as the psychological, with good reason: a five-hour bout of chess has been estimated to consume as much energy as a game of ice-hockey or a boxing joust.

That is the system that brought Maya where she is today. Indian players have nothing even remotely resembling this and have to rely on their own talents and analytical ability. Kuzmin affirms: "Indian players—Parameswaran, Thipsay, Ravisekhar and now Barua—are very talented and certainly can reach very high levels in chess." Another bright prospect is 13-year-old Master prodigy V. Anand who recently finished fourth in the latest national rankings. Chess enthusiasts are now looking forward to a lot of winning combinations from the Indian stars but, as Maya says encouragingly, "You need a renaissance of chess in India, and it must become the folk game that it once was, in the land of its origin." —ASHOK ALEXANDER and JAGANNATH DUBASHI

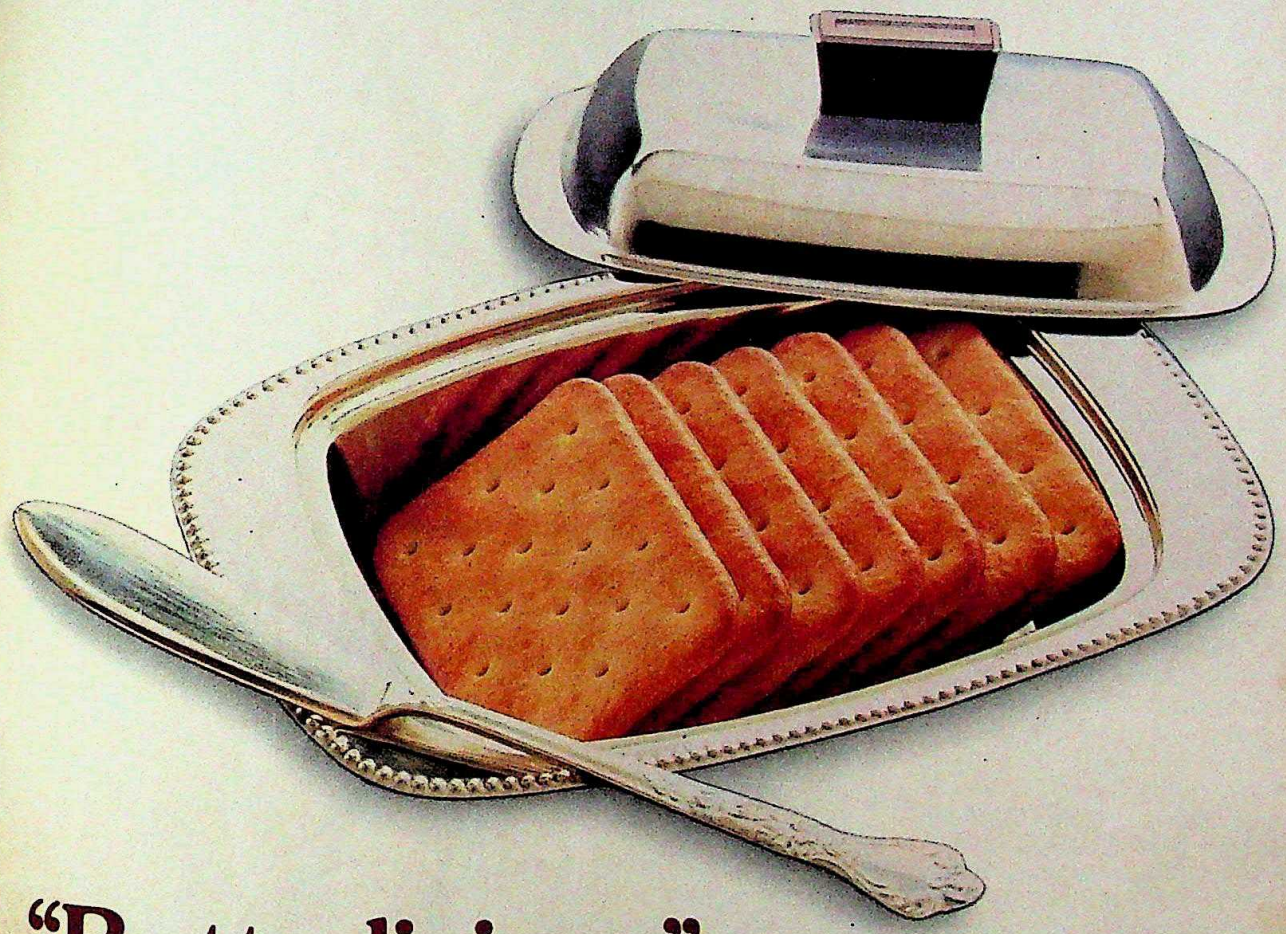


HARI OM GULATI

Maya Cheburdonidze: masterly moves

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"Butterlicious"



BRITANNIA

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A Magical Reverie

DECCANI PAINTINGS
by MARK ZEBROWSKI
Roli Books International
Pages: Price: Rs 550



IN RECENT years, Indian miniature paintings have acquired the status of an exalted cliché. Originals are rare to find and hard to buy. Fakes, often very astute, flood the market. And as the body of documentation grows and published research proliferates, miniatures have proved a hardy flog for India. On posters and greeting cards, biscuit tins and pocket calendars, their presence is so ubiquitous as a pop image that no Indian tourist promotion could ever be complete without a vision of Radha and Krishna drooling in trance-like idyll. The Kishangarh beauty has coarsened before our very eyes, hookah-smoking nobs from Guler deserve to be shut away in dark corners of corridors. Krishna floating away on the barge of love must be an ITDC fabrication. And Mansur's turkey looks only good enough to eat.

Indian miniatures, however, remain fortunate. The sheer number of styles that emerged over an approximate period of 500 years as well as the various purposes they were assigned have made miniature painting worth looking at over and over again. And the diversity is seemingly inexhaustible.

Mark Zebrowski, a London-based American scholar, first came to India in the late 1960s as a Peace Corps volunteer based near Hyderabad. The uneasy lethargy of that trip, he writes in the introduction of this landmark volume that opens up for us a new world of Indian miniatures, pressed him to seek another India outside the realm of his immediate experience. He stumbled into the Salar Jang Museum, into the office of Muhammad Ashraf, the late art scholar who conjured the world of the Deccani kingdoms that flourished parallel to the Mughal Empire but poles apart from it.

Over the years, Zebrowski's chance encounter with Deccani painting developed into an obsession and as he pursued it, looking for specimens in museums and private collections in far corners of the world, his original instinct in Hyderabad proved right. He had stumbled upon a new world, never properly or accurately chronicled before, its art frequently mistaken and generally misunderstood. His findings, exhaustively researched and catalogued in easily the most exciting art book of the year, are unique. They are a pleasure for both the art scholar and the dilettante because they are a mystery unravelled.

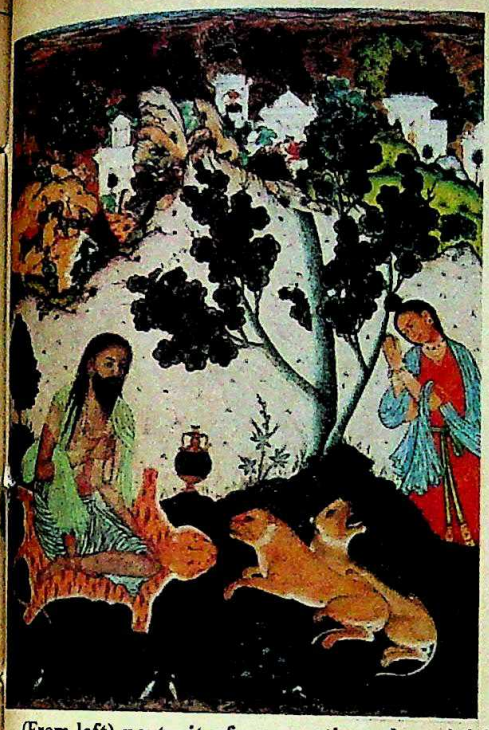


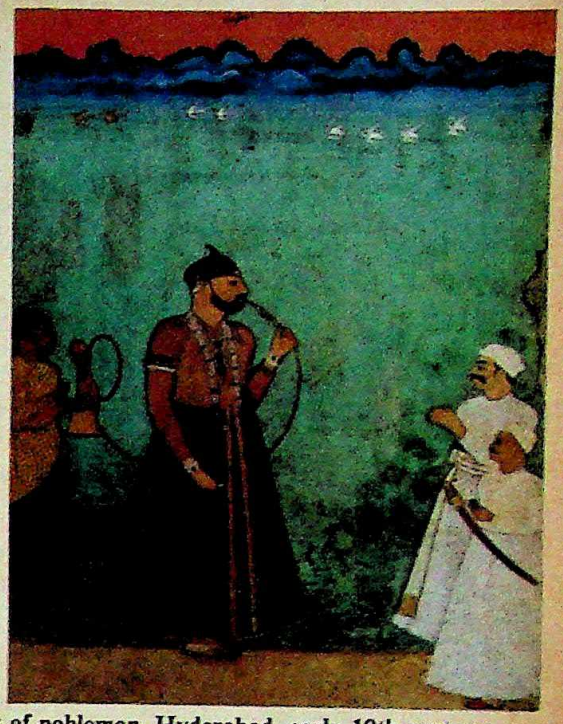
***Yogini* by a Bijapur painter, early 17th century**

As visual masterpieces, south Indian miniatures painted for the ruling sultans of the Deccani kingdoms in the 16th and 17th centuries, are like no other Indian miniatures. Their vivid, glowing colours, their magical detailing and fantastic, mystical subject matter, set them apart as the most intriguing and dream-like of Indian miniatures.

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(From left) portrait of an ascetic and *yogini* from Bijapur, 17th century; and portrait of nobleman, Hyderabad, early 19th century

Part of the allure of mystery that surrounds them comes from the fact that not so much is known about the three Deccani kingdoms of Bijapur, Ahmadnagar and Golconda spawned in the 16th century. "The Deccani sultans," says Zebrowski, "lacked the customary Islamic passion for historical record...moreover, Deccani paintings are rarely dated or inscribed with the names of artists or patrons, as Mughal or Rajasthani pictures often are."

Yet that is a comparatively insubstantial trait differentiating them from their illustrious contemporaries, the Mughals. The founders of south Indian sultanates were staunch Shias, allying themselves with the Safavid dynasty of Iran, and opposed to the Sunni Mughals of northern India. As all the Deccan sultanates preserved a degree of independence from northern India until 1650 when the last Nizam of Hyderabad relinquished power, a distinct Islamic culture prevailed there.

It is both the degree of political independence and the strong association with Safavid Iran that led to an unusual renaissance in the Deccan. "In most Deccani art," says Zebrowski, "fantastic colours and exuberant distortions of form create a restless opulence and a romantic nostalgia for another time and place. Paintings—as well as the palaces and tombs of Gulbarga, Bidar and Bijapur—make the spirit soar, like visions from the *Arabian Nights*, for they are in fact south Indian visions of Iran, constructed by native craftsmen to satisfy the yearnings of Middle Eastern conquerors for a lost world. Deccani is not exactly south Indian, although produced there, nor is it Iranian, although that is the country of inspiration. Instead it is a pungent amalgam of both worlds, an impossible dream, which fills us with the same reveries that moved the indolent sultans of the Deccan."

For years, the remains of these paintings were classified as Persian, Indo-Persian or Mughal. It wasn't till the 1930s that a certain amount of research began to recognise them as a distinct school; and it was as recently as a decade or so that new Deccani paintings came to light, firmly establishing its long lineage. About 200 miniatures from the sultanates have to date been identified and, astonishingly, the majority seem to be scattered in collections abroad. However, they are all reproduced in this book, under separate chapters devoted to the schools and classified by their chief patrons.

Easily the most impressive of the lot are the paintings which have come from Bijapur, from the reign of Sultan Ibrahim Adil Shah II (1579-1627). It is possible to isolate the works of four Bijapuri masters, says Zebrowski, though their names remain unknown as no reliably inscribed paintings by them have come to light. He calls them the Bikaner painter, the Bodleian painter, the Leningrad painter and the Dublin painter, after the present locations of their best work.

The grand master of the four is the Leningrad painter, creator of the portrait of *Sultan Ibrahim Adil Shah II hawking*—in a pink and gold dress the young sultan astride a horse gallops through a lush landscape, a white hawk on his outstretched arm. In the sense of pleasure it conveys—the movement of the horse, the superb detail of the flora, the colours of the sky and the stylised rocks and birds of the backdrop—it remains a masterpiece of all miniature painting.

He also includes the claims that Deccani painting continued to flourish after the Mughals annexed the kingdoms: rather than becoming a "pale mimmickry" of Mughal styles, it continued in an original and stylish synthesis. Zebrowski's argument is that the purpose of Deccani painting was quite different to that of the Mughal, where emperors commissioned artists to portray their regal presence. In Deccan art, he says, "Princely portraits predominate which aim to establish a gently lyrical atmosphere...we are admitted into the private world of feeling."

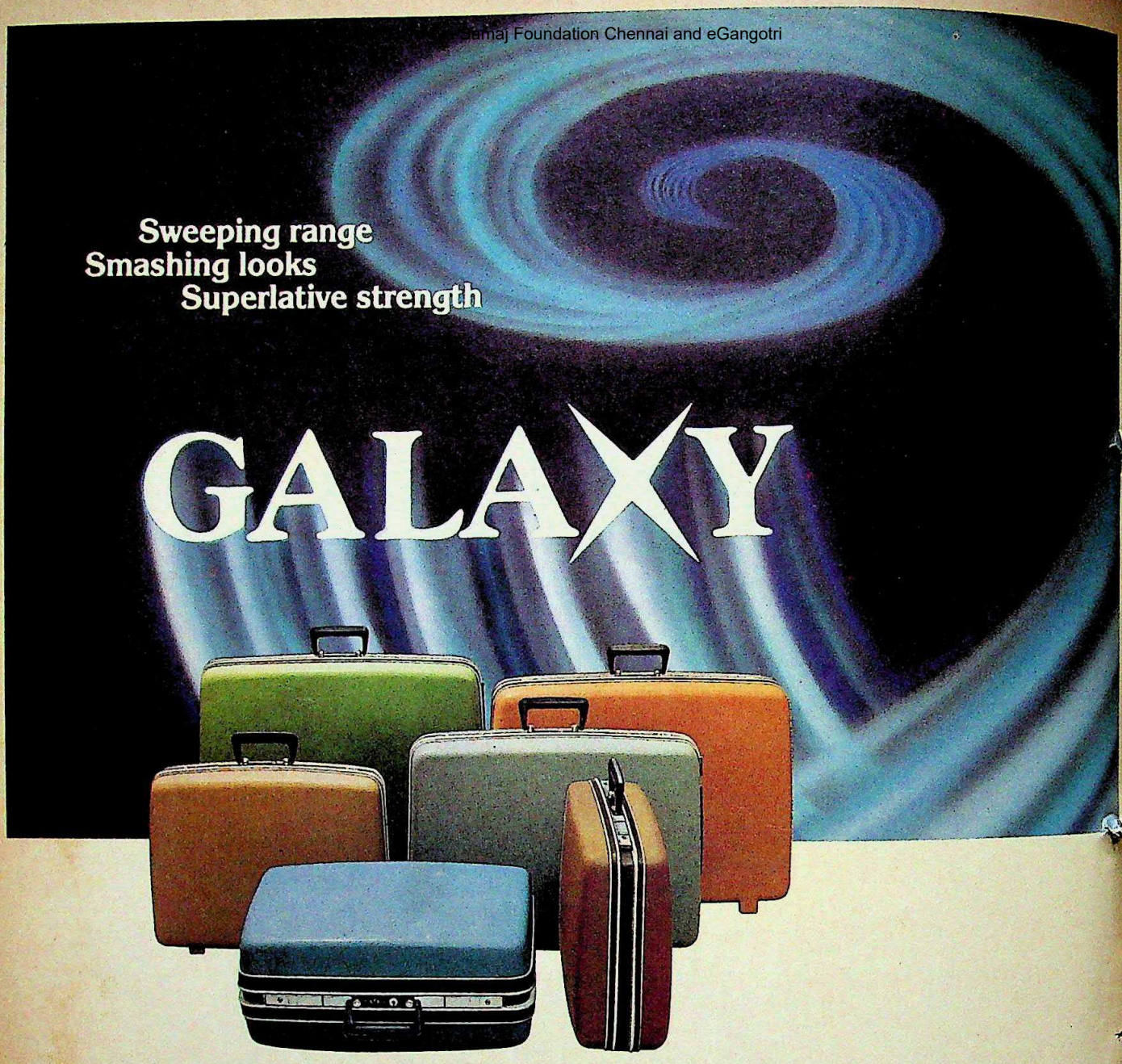
By the 17th century the startling originality of Deccani painting may have become diluted but, surveying the annals of later painting, he finds sudden flashes of vivid colouring, of the individual imagination of the painter impetuously running riot.

Zebrowski follows the development of Deccani painting right up to the second half of the 19th century with ironically a painting of another prince hawking. Nearly 300 years after the brilliant miniature of Adil Shah II hawking, some of iridescence of costume and vivid colouring of landscape and sky survive. And the author believes that the creative energy can be revived in the 20th century. "Despite the decline of painting throughout India during the 19th century," he says, "such masterpieces prove that creative talent still existed. It still exists today, if only patrons could be found to bring it forth."

—SUNIL SETHI

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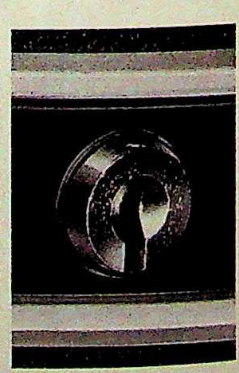


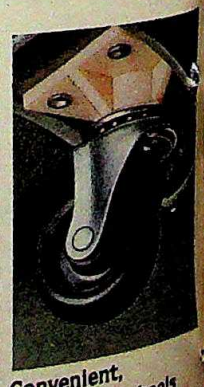
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PUBLISHING

Foreign Royalty Wrangle

IS PUBLISHING a book or writing for magazines abroad a crime under the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA), even if all payments are declared in India? Yes, if a recent judgement of the Enforcement Directorate is anything to go by. Last month, the directorate decided that, in getting his books published in England, author Arun Bose, a lecturer at Delhi University, had contravened FERA because such acts were of a commercial nature and he should have obtained the permission of the Central Government before doing so. However, as Bose had been remitting all the foreign exchange earned through the proper banking channels, the directorate took a lenient view and imposed only a penalty of Rs 200.

The author has appealed to the Appellate Tribunal in the Law Ministry because, as he puts it, "a principle is at stake". Indeed, if the tribunal upholds the decision, then it would become necessary for any writer trying to get his work published abroad to get the permission of the Central Government. Says Ramesh Thapar, editor of *Seminar*, and Bose's supporter: "The action is a threat to every writer and journalist."

The issue involves Prime Minister Indira Gandhi herself, as she signed an agreement for a 50 per cent share in the royalty earnings of her biography written by a French author and published abroad. For another book, *Eternal India*, also published abroad, she received a one-time payment.

The books involved in the present tussle are Bose's *Marxian and Post-Marxian Political Economy*, published by Penguin in 1975 and his *Political Paradoxes and Puzzles*, for which the author had entered into an agreement with The Clarendon Press, Oxford. The point of law is whether such publishing agreements are a commercial activity. Sections 27(1) and 27(6) of FERA under which Bose is charged provide that "no person resident in India shall, without the previous permission of the Central Government, associate himself with, or participate whether as promoter or otherwise, in a concern outside India engaged in or intending to engage in, any activity of a trading, commercial or industrial nature, whether such concern is a body corporate or not".

The Enforcement Directorate decided that Penguin and The Clarendon Press carried on trading or commercial activity in the United Kingdom and represent a "body corporate". The word "associate" not being defined in the act, the directorate authorities looked up the Concise Oxford Dictionary and found that the dictionary defined it as a verb, "join (persons, things or one with another), combine for a common purpose or intercourse (with)". The directorate concludes: "Here Mr Arun Bose joined with another (the foreign publisher) in publishing his book and hence associates himself. Similarly he combined for a common purpose and also had intercourse with the foreign publisher in publishing his books."

HARI OM GULATI



Bose: raising crucial questions

Officially, the directorate refuses to comment. Says S.P. Mandal, officiating director of the directorate: "We cannot say anything till the Appellate Tribunal in the Law Ministry takes up the appeal and gives its judgement. If they uphold the appeal, we may or may not go to the high court. It is equally open to the party to go to the high court if they reject the appeal since the point under dispute is a law point." But other officials say the matter had been referred to the Law Ministry which had chosen to give this interpretation of Section 27 in Bose's case.

If the tribunal upholds the decision, then it would become necessary for any writer trying to get his work published abroad to get the permission of the Central Government.

It did not necessarily follow that the directorate would move against all writers published abroad. Says an official: "It is a law point and needs to be clarified once and for all. If the appeal is upheld, either an amendment would have to follow or the case itself can be cited as an example and future considerations of similar cases excluded from the directorate's purview." Comments writer Khushwant Singh: "They just will not be able to carry it through. Every writer worth his salt publishes abroad. The publishers there are prompt and honest in paying you."

For Bose, the story began in 1975 soon after his first book was published. He received remittances from abroad in the form of international money orders and cheques which he cashed in India. He also demanded and got, from the income tax authorities, a rebate on foreign royalty income. However, the rebate was disallowed in 1977 when the income tax officer changed. Says Bose: "As the amount was not much I gave up."

In December the same year an official and a constable from the Enforcement Directorate paid him a visit at his college. "They told me they had received secret information that I was maintaining a royalty account abroad," says Bose. "I was under the impression that perhaps they had mistaken Penguin, whose royalty account statement I had attached to my returns, for a bank. I explained that Penguin was not a bank, that I did not maintain any bank account abroad."

Bose told his visitors that he had cashed his earnings with the State Bank of India and also told them of his agreement with The Clarendon Press. Remembers Bose: "The constable asked me whether I had taken permission before getting the book published and I replied with a definite no. I thought the matter would end there."

It didn't. In July 1978 Bose received a show cause notice asking him to reply within a month why proceedings should not be started against him for contravention of Section 27(1) and 27(6) of FERA. "I took the stand that the section had nothing to do with authorship and publishing," says Bose. He thereupon received forms from the directorate which he was supposed to fill to seek permission for publication. The author realised that "the forms were totally irrelevant since they were apparently meant for business concerns: they asked me to furnish information like who were my partners and so on. I refused to fill them."

In January 1980, he and his lawyer appeared before the directorate and followed this oral plea with written arguments. Three years later, he was asked to appear again; Bose wrote back saying that he had already made oral and written submissions and that the directorate could pass their orders on this basis. The orders came through and Bose decided to file an appeal, though he could do so only after he had paid the fine of Rs 200.

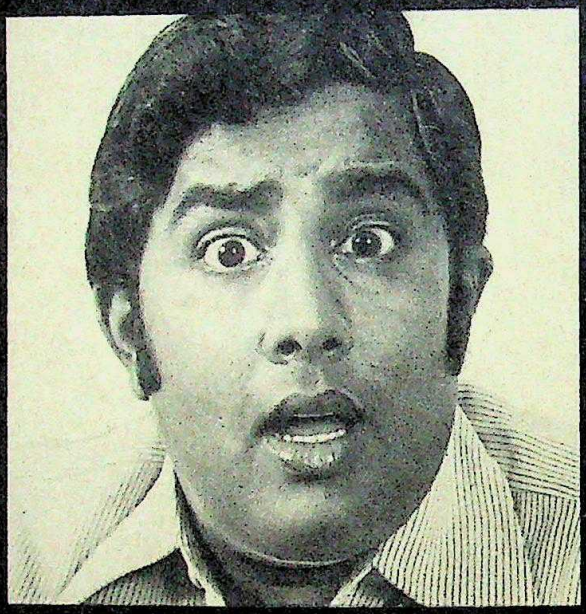
Is this just a storm in a teacup, the result of unwarranted zeal by the authorities? Or does the Enforcement Directorate's order conceal other motives—Bose is a leftist. Either way, the judgement has alarming implications for dozens of India writers and authors.

—PRABHA DUTT

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DANCE

Kalakshetra's Queen

HER EYES are still wide and as clear as the big dawn sky over the Bay of Bengal on whose shores she grew up. She has just turned 80, though, and has therefore seen a thousand full moons. Rukmini Devi Arundale came to the capital last fortnight leading a troupe of dancers from her famed Kalakshetra school, giving the first major recital of her dance dramas to packed halls of admiring audiences in Delhi. The three-day Kalakshetra Dance Festival, organised by the Bharatiya Kala Kendra—among the more substantial and dedicated dance schools in the city—presented a feast for the eyes and ears in Kalakshetra staples like Koormavatara, Sabari Mokcham and Rukmini Kalyanam.

Unlike most dancers, Rukmini Devi came to dance late, long after her teens through a maze of social obstacles. Dance in her time belonged to the shadowy taper-lit cloisters of temples and bharatanatyam was the exclusive preserve of the community of Devadasis. Their art then dared not be publicly acknowledged, as Rukmini Devi says, by "decent people". So what did this intrepid lady do? She waded right in and pulled the dance out into the fierce glare of middle class horror and shock. The result was the establishment in 1936 of the most challenging and innovative educational experiment, which came to be known as Kalakshetra. Mohan Khokar, the first North Indian to learn dance in the south says: "Dance schools, whether Kalamandalam or any other, merely make dancers. Kalakshetra makes a full human being—educated, urbane and fully engaged."

It was the direct influence of the legendary Anna Pavlova that bent her steps in the direction of dance. And it was through the rigours of ballet which she studied under Cleo Record that she finally mastered the sinuous grace and powers of bharatanatyam, reordered the emphasis on explicit eroticism whether in the lyrics or in the movements and brought the dance into the salons and concert halls of the nation.

Nandini Sankaran, a long-time student of comparative dance, points out that Kalakshetra has a distinctive style. "Kalakshetra's low-key approach to sringara, the graceful erotic element in dance, puts off many people who feel the zest goes out of dance with sanitising its sringara," she says. Leela Samson, a Kalakshetra-trained dancer and teacher feels that "Rukmini Arundale's art is not against the sringara rasa at all. What she has done is to put the sringara rasa (or flavour) in essentially female terms not as it used to be required among the Devadasis in male terms. This puts sringara into proportion, into scale and its assertive quality is replaced by an inward essence that is no longer erotic in the ordinary sense".

BHAWAN SINGH



Rukmini Devi: innovative educational experiments

Acclaimed as one of the finest dancers of her time, she took Indian dance out into the world. Astrid Sati said of her: "She dances from the heart. That is good. God gives grace. The rest can be acquired by work. Grace which is learnt goes so far and no further. God-given grace has no limits." Mohan Khokar describes his first meeting with Rukmini Devi: "She sat there glowing, dressed in white, her face the colour of pale ivory, with a pet parrot perched on her shoulder. The very image of Andal." Leela Samson adds: "Dance is hallucinatory, it is a world that dancers inhabit and occasionally leave, to deal with the world outside the footlights. The personality of Rukmini Devi is such that those who see her truly are so taken with her gift of life and conviction that they become lifelong slaves to the service of her cause. It is this that has taken Kalakshetra through these many decades."

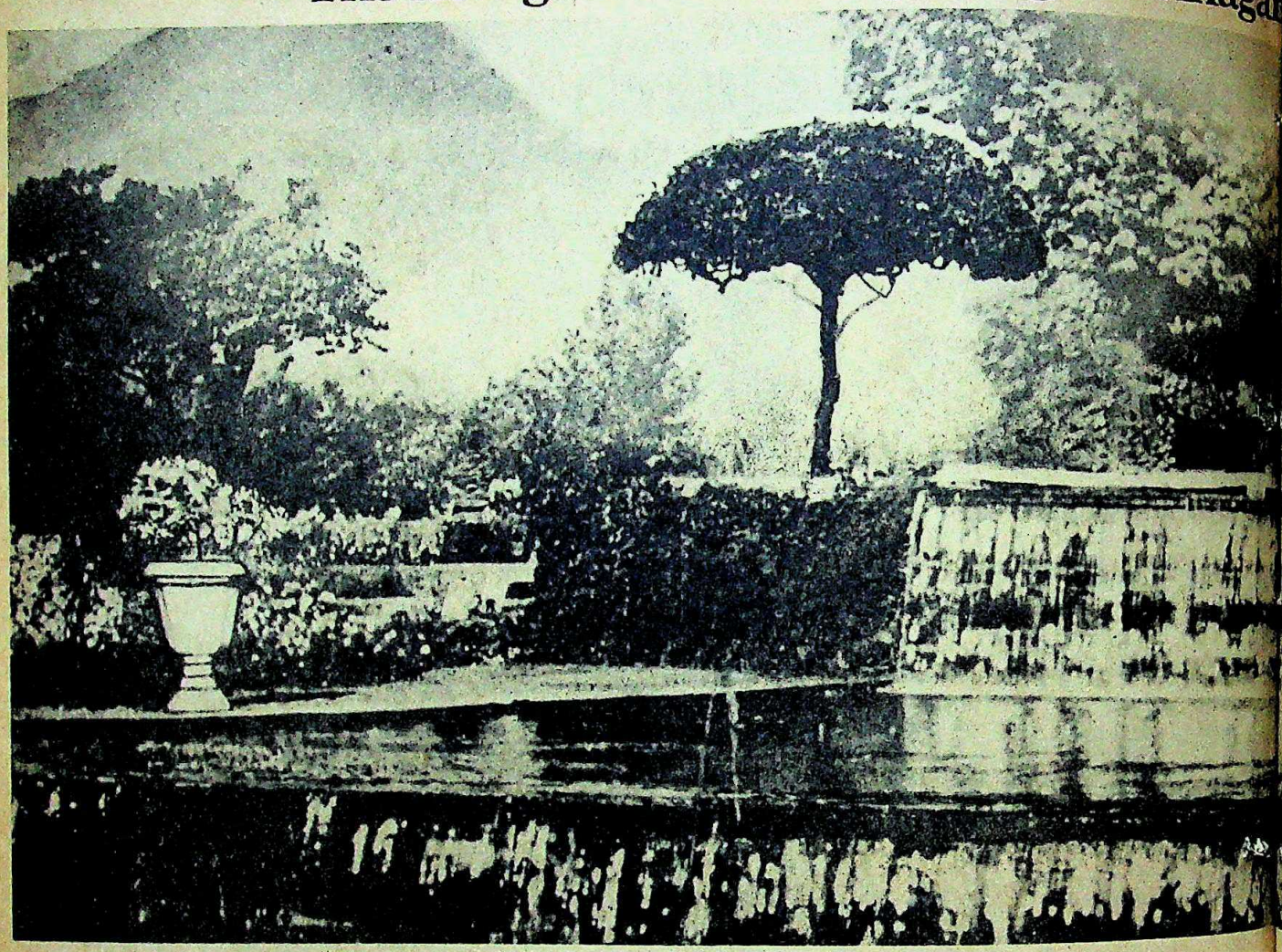
As part of the Theosophical movement in the early part of this century, Rukmini Devi formed an inseparable part of the world of J. Krishnamurthi and Madame Blavatsky, educational pathfinders like Dr Maria Montessori and, of course, her own evangelist husband George Arundale. At once practical and other-worldly, gently reformist without slogans, her interests over the years have embraced the welfare of animals and as an MP she was the mind behind many Rajya Sabha legislations.

The Kalakshetra motifs, the delicate tropical pastels of her costumes are all the products of Kalakshetra's weaving department. The Besant School teaches the young and puts them through a rigorous educational experience in the interstices of vigorous dance instruction and practice. Her management skills are proven. "By a fanatical adherence to the principles of humanism and art, by that fine alchemy of vision and practical common sense, she has attracted to her service men of exceptional nobility," says Subbulakshmi Khan, one of her students. Of the future of Kalakshetra, she says: "Everything just happened. And I do not look beyond one day at a time." —RAGHAVA R. MENON

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The new garden resort opening in Srinagar just



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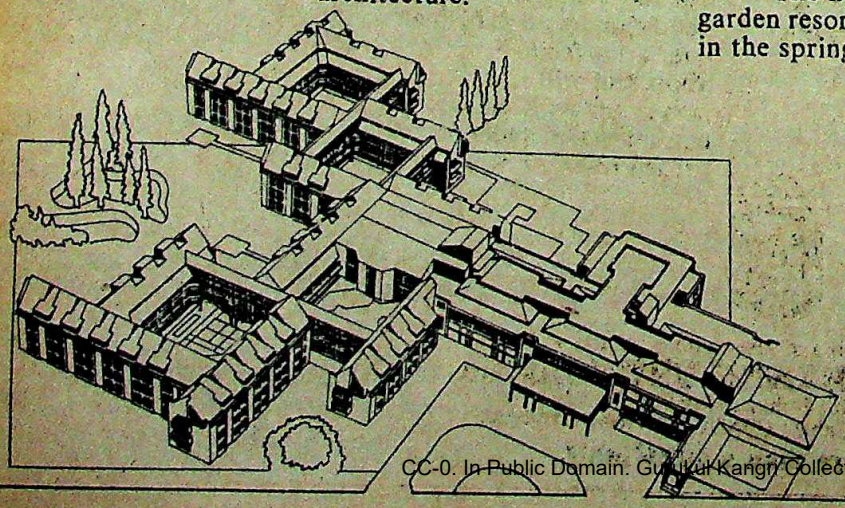
A visionary and Nature lover, Jahangir felt that man could never excel Nature's handiwork, but merely give it a touch of order.

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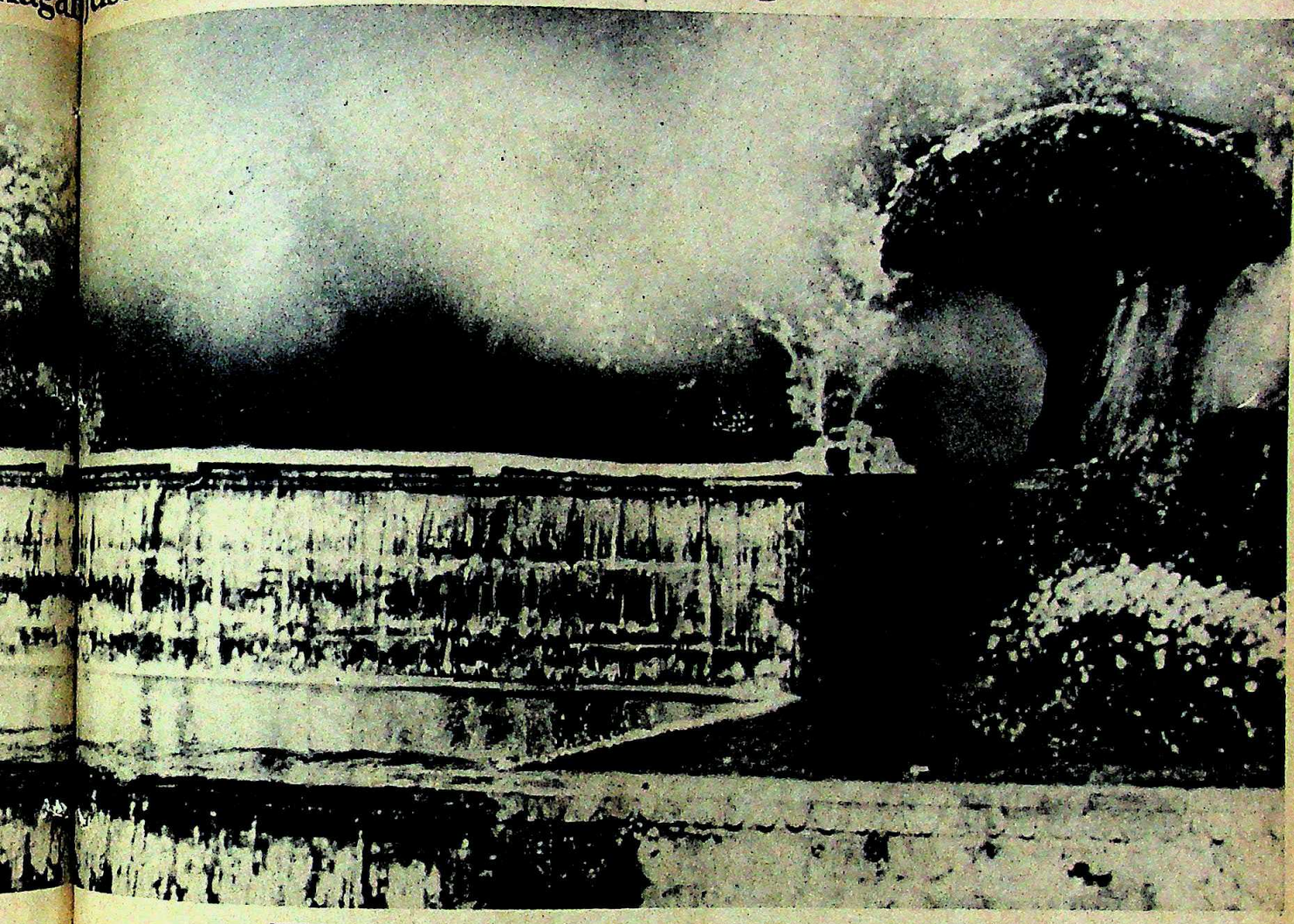
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POETRY

A Rare Bard

HOW MANY poets are there in West Bengal? The jaded but telling Calcutta joke is: the number is anybody's guess but add one to it, because a poet must have been born the moment the question was asked. In Bengali, where the publishers have recently counted 1,600 literary magazines that regularly publish poetry, to be a poet is no big event. But Shakti Chattopadhyay is still a rare bard.

Last fortnight, the news of Chattopadhyay winning the Sahitya Akademi award for outstanding literary achievement in Bengali in 1983 was greeted in Calcutta with eyebrows raised to exclaim: "At last...." Receiving the citation and the Rs 10,000 cash prize from Akademi President Vinay Krishan Gokak in Delhi, Chattopadhyay himself said: "There are many who think I should have got it earlier. But men should wait." He surely put waiting to good use for, with 41 titles, and over 1,20,000 copies of his books sold, Chattopadhyay is by all reckoning the most popular among living Bengali poets.

Except Rabindranath Tagore, who died in 1941, and Jibanananda Das who died in 1954, no Bengali poet has been more adored, and imitated, than Chattopadhyay. Now gracefully greying at 51, he became a cult figure as early as the '60s for his iconoclasm—in his poetry as well as in his public behaviour. Generations of youngsters with poetic aspirations have done pub-crawling and tried to live a bohemian life only because Chattopadhyay did so. Many have attempted to mimic the jazz-like jaggedness of his poetry, the surprise hidden in his imagery, and the awesome range of his vocabulary. Like all good poets, he has baffled imitators.

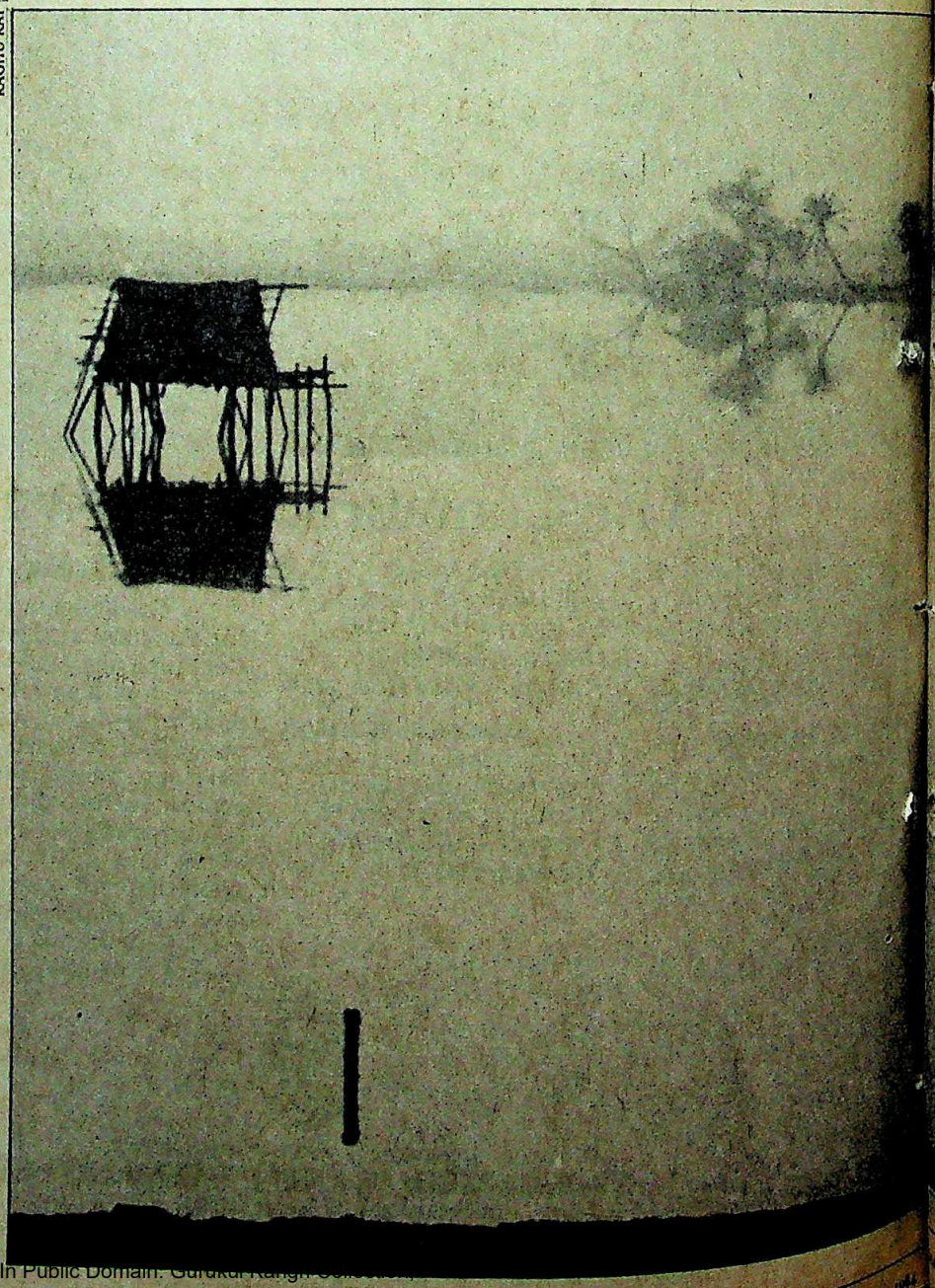
Poets are seldom prolific, but he has written like clockwork—about 10,000 poems in a little less than 30 years. He, and his peers in the influential poetry quarterly, *Krittibas*, liberated modern poetry from the campuses in the late '50s. It was through their efforts that the fog of punditry began to lift from Bengali verse. The poets of the previous years were almost invariably teachers of literature in colleges and universities, some of them fine poets but their sensibilities were coloured by scholarship rather than contact with life.

Chattopadhyay has far from a scholastic background. Born in a south Bengal village, he lost his lawyer father when he was an infant and was supported by his tyrant grandfather, in exchange of which he had to tend the family's vegetable garden, till land, and do menial jobs. "I was some sort of a young farm hand," he reminisces. One of his many odd jobs was to help his grandpa prepare homoeopathic medicines which he sold on the side. "It was a disgusting job and I piddled into one of those tiny bottles once."

Separated from his mother, who had to drudge on for a living in a relative's house in distant Calcutta, the young Chattopadhyay found companionship only with nature. Decades later, when he had moved out to the big city, and had settled down to write poetry, the dirty brown colour of mud, the rawness of adolescent sexuality, and the twisted speech rhythm of south Bengal began finding expression in his poetry in an altogether unconventional manner. "Urban pastoral" says Nityapriya Ghosh, literary critic and Chattopadhyay's friend from college days about his poems.

Of all the innovations that Chattopadhyay is credited with, the most significant is his diction—honed out of an unending gamut of village words, and placed forcibly and with great dramatic effect in the close neighbourhood of respectable, Sanskrit-derived phrases. Then he infuses the lines with an inner rhythm which is as informal as everyday speech and is yet textured with exquisite precision. The physical and emotional context of his poetry is totally Bengali and is quite different from the "universality"

RAGHU RAI



Chattopadhyay: an inner rhythm

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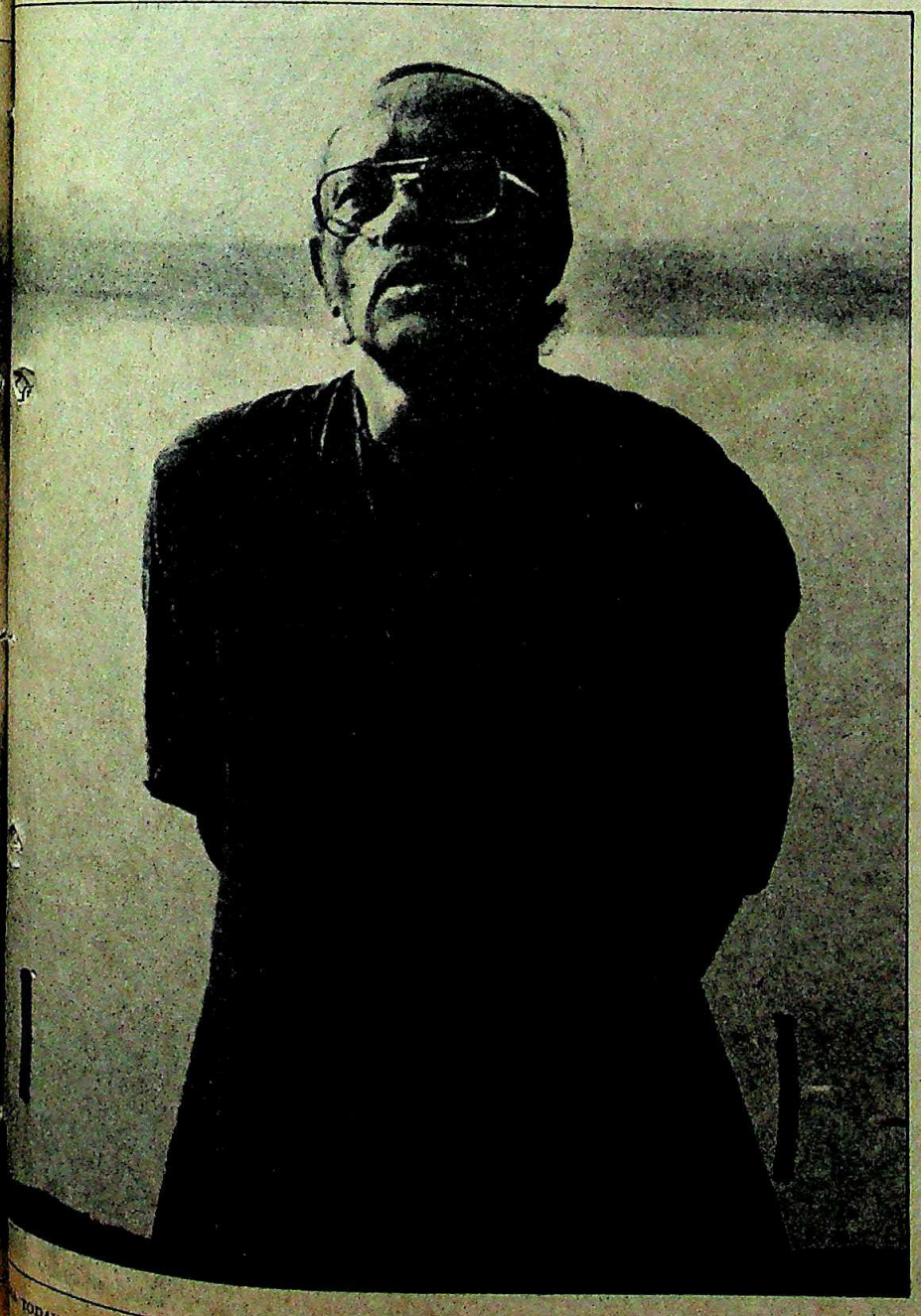
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hat is often popularly attributed to some of agore's poetry.

His first collection of poems, *Hey prem,* ey *naishyabda* (O love, O silence), publis- ed in 1956, was solemn and rather pom- ous. But when his second work appeared in 961, funnily titled *You're in religion, in the raffe too*, the distinctive qualities of his oetry were manifest. These are romantic ly- ics, composed with a great linguistic verve aced with wry humour. *Abani, are you home*, poem written during this period, conveyed ith eerie precision and in just 12 lines a mid- ight knock at the door. It became one of the est-remembered Bengali verses surviving om the '60s.

He wrote about love, about death, out fantasy and illusion. His lines inva- ibly explore the mental climate rather than being explicit or making a statement. He writes: "Imagine,/ The platform rolling away leaving the train behind/and the stars are radiant beside dimmed bulbs,/Imagine,/The shoe marching away while the feet are still." An element of fantasy ripples through everything that he writes. "I do something like autowritings," he says, "when I allow my feelings to do anything they like with the lines, the words and the images."

In Bengal, he is inevitably bracketed with Sunil Gangopadhyay, 50, novelist and poet, whose literary career began at the same time as Chattopadhyay's, and who is his friend for 30 years. Gangopadhyay and Chattopadhyay are colleagues in the same newspaper organisation, Ananda Bazar Patrika: Gangopadhyay is an assistant editor in its literary weekly, *Desh*, while Chattopadhyay is a sub-editor in the news section.



"Shakti showed signs of a major poet right from the beginning," recalls Gangopadhyay. Yet the "Shakti-Sunil" duo, frequently invited together to recite poetry (they have published two joint ventures) at various recitals, is a study in contrast. Gangopadhyay—a man of regular habits, never at war with society, and always trying to enlarge his canvas with experiences picked up from life and literature, whereas Chattopadhyay is the perpetual bohemian, always drawing inwards for his inspiration.

The tales of Chattopadhyay's quirks are legion. He got very upset once when the management of the Ananda Bazar Patrika ordered that he had to be on the night shift for some days in the month like all other subs. Not to be outdone, he played a prank on the first copy given to him: on the list of ministers in a new Orissa cabinet, he included his own name as the education minister. The gaffe was detected minutes before the rotaries were to roll, and Chattopadhyay was forthwith withdrawn from the night shift.

He has an itching foot. Gangopadhyay recalls that he had gone to the station once to see off a friend but instead boarded the train himself, to return home after four months. Soon after his marriage, he left home one day telling wife Minakashi that he was going for cigarettes. He met a friend on the way who was driving up to Bhutan in his car. Chattopadhyay slipped in and was off to Bhutan.

"Shakti's best poems," says Gangopadhyay, "are an extended autobiography of his dissatisfied, itinerant spirit." But the uncontrollable urge for adventure in Chattopadhyay is already waning. "I can go, but why should I?" he says. The 1983 volume of poems that won him the award, was composed when he had mellowed down, was off his drinks, and obsessed with death. He writes: "I have curtailed time for youth/This is twilight hour, evening/Not yet night, though/ The night is not too far away."

His poetry mesmerised a generation because he consciously or unconsciously lived up to the image of the poet as an outsider, a Don Quixote of letters who sought adventure in words and their music which corresponded with a unique life-style. "I live as regularly now as a clerk," Chattopadhyay said. The royalty from the sale of his books has earned him a relative stability. Gone are the sudden disappearances, the Bacchanalia and the restlessness. Life is strictly one-to-five, punctuated by administering medicines for a weakened heart and an ailing liver.

Has he written his best poem yet? "No, not yet," says Chattopadhyay, visibly bracing himself up for the question, and hoping that the award, like most awards, will not sit like an engraved headstone on the tomb of talent.

—SUMIT MITRA in Calcutta

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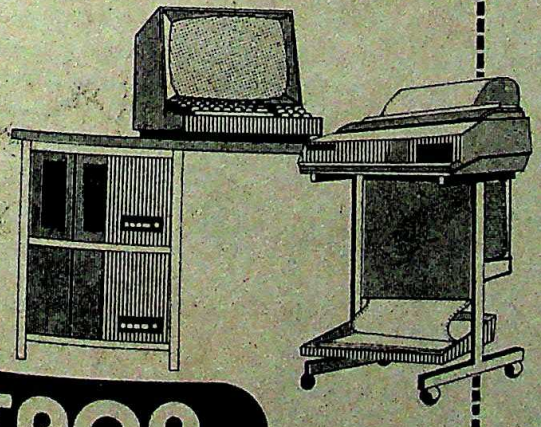
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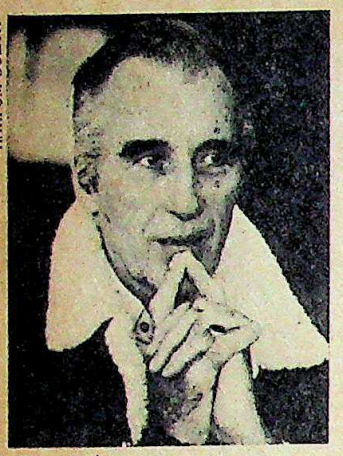
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HARI OM GULATI

Lee: change of image

■ There's something instantly lovable about the man who personified horror and evil to a whole generation of film goers. **Christopher Lee**, the legendary Count Dracula of the screen, confesses: "That was 12 years back. Now I feel like making my audiences laugh." Last fortnight Lee, suffering from an allergy after a stint of shooting in Jodhpur, was ready to fly back to more conducive climes. Lee is playing a key character in a film called *Bengal Lancers*, currently being filmed in India and produced by the London-based Pakistani businessman **Mahmoud Sipra** (of Salma Agha fame). The feature film will also star Michael York, Trevor Howard and Emma Sutton. Lee said: "I play a British governor of Punjab who is corrupt, evil and mean —like a lot of civil servants of today...all over the world."

■ Fashion model **Nandini Sen** still has to outgrow her innocent, 'sweet 16' looks. But in other areas she is running ahead full steam. Having established her Bombay boutique, appropriately called Clotheshorse, she is roaming in newer pastures. Her next project is a film role in *Surkhiyan*. Says Sen: "I made up my mind to act in the film in half-an-hour. It's turning out to be great. I wish I had decided to join earlier" adding, "I'd love to act opposite Amitabh Bachchan, Rishi Kapoor, Raj Babbar and Naseeruddin Shah." So would every other starlet in the film industry.

■ Till recently, he could have been yet another author in search of a publisher. But **Ashish Jain**, 12, precocious, ambitious and much older than his age finally found someone willing to publish his 71-page tome on the English cricket team's tour of India in '81 and '82. Although Jain, probably the youngest author in India, doesn't play cricket himself, due to a dust allergy, he has obviously displayed his loyalty and devotion to the game. Jain started collecting statistics and data for his book when he was just 10, and finally completed it in April last year. His father approached a few publishers but most of them refused to publish the book because it offered little commercial value. Finally, a fledgling publishing house accepted the manuscript and it has today evoked a great deal of interest in cricketing circles. Finally a word of advice for the Indian cricket team from the young author: "They should look for a good pace bowler, only then will they stay on the top."



Jain: scoring big



Khambatta: starry-eyed

■ **Persis Khambatta**, the former beauty queen and model-turned actress, manages to squeeze her lithe frame into the limelight wherever she may be. Last month the US-based actress (*Star Trek*) was back armed with an ambitious new venture. Khambatta announced her intention to co-produce a film, for which she claimed she had roped in an American producer and the Hollywood star Omar Sharif. There were yet more surprises: she has also approached Hindi film director Rahul Rawail (hit film *Betaab*) to direct her yet unnamed feature.



Sen: hitting the big screen

SIGN POSTS

■ **Awarded:** Gandhian Baba Amte, the 1983 Damien-Dutton award for his innovative work in the field of leprosy.

■ **Awarded:** The 1983 Sahitya Akademi awards to 18 writers including Nirmalprabha Bardoloi (Assamese); Nissim Ezekiel (Indian-English); Suresh Joshi (Gujarati); Yashwant Chittal (Kannada); Pritam Singh Safeer (Punjabi) and Malik Ram (Urdu).

■ **Awarded:** Dr Avtar Singh Paintal, the first Nehru Award for Sciences. Dr Paintal is the director of the capital's Sardar Patel Chest Institute.

■ **Honoured:** Professor Sukhmoy Chakravarty, of Delhi's School of Economics, the Jawahar Lal Nehru visiting professorship for 1984-85 at the University of Cambridge.

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10 **Voices**
15 **Indianotes**
Current Events
18 Congress(I): Election Exercise
20 Rajya Sabha: The Two-Thirds Question
23 Janata Party: Personality Politics
24 Maruti: Jumping the Queue
26 Voting Machines: The Ballot Battle
31 Madhya Pradesh: Governor's Gaffe
32 Andhra Pradesh: Bureaucratic Backlash
35 Kerala: A Costly Explosion
36 Punjab: Marching for Peace
38 Kurukshetra University: Suspended Animation
40 Karnataka: Riotous Scenes
47 Karnataka: Settling Grievances
53 West Bengal: Disturbing the Peace
59 West Bengal: A House in Disorder
Cover Story
60 Maharashtra: Patils under Pressure
Perspective
79 Indo-Soviet Relations: For Better or for Worse
Education
82 Visva-Bharati: A Dream Gone Sour
Investigation
88 Sri Lanka Rebels: Ominous Presence in Tamil Nadu
Letter from Washington
99 Narcotics: Asian Alarm
Special Feature
102 Madhya Pradesh: Fraud in the Forest
Crime
106 Drugs: The Cochin Conduit
111 **Trade Winds**
The Economy
112 The Budget: The Spending Spree
Business
114 Company Law: Tightening the Reins
117 Computers: Byte for a Byte
121 Gujarat: Boat Busting
127 Eicher Goodearth: Rescue Operation
128 FCI: The Grain Drain
130 Pharmaceutical Industry: Carrying on Regardless
132 Swadeshi Polytex: Corporate Quarrel
133 The Markets: Hoping for More
Environment
138 Karnataka: Burning Issue
Books
143 Exhaustive Effort
The Arts
145 Ghazals: Songs of Success
Wildlife
150 Kaziranga: Poachers' Preserve
152 **Eye-catchers**

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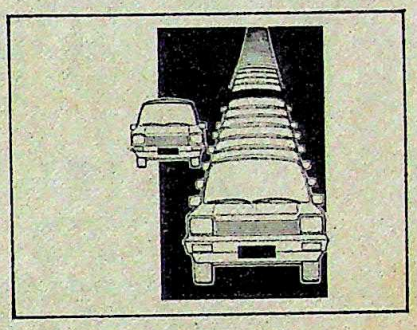
IN FOCUS THIS FORTNIGHT



Cover Story

Maharashtra's turbulent political scene staged yet another of its dramatic turnarounds last fortnight. Supporters of former chief minister A.R. Antulay petitioned the Government for prosecution of Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil and wife Shalinitai under the Prevention of Corruption Act, a move that puts the political partnership of the Patils under pressure.

Cover Story ● Page 60



Maruti

Maruti cars have come to be the biggest status symbols in the country. And with their tremendous market value, have come any number of customers eager to beat the three-year-long queue to acquire the car. Among the favoured few given out-of-turn allotments are MP's, ministers, wives of government officials, dancers, journalists and members of the judiciary.

Current Events ● Page 24



Sri Lanka Rebels

Quietly and methodically, Sri Lankan Tamil rebels have been acquiring arms and training for what they claim will be an attempt to carve out an independent Tamil Eelam in northern Sri Lanka. A large number of them have been training in obscure parts of Tamil Nadu. Meanwhile, the Sri Lanka Government is intensifying its efforts to stamp down the rebel operations.

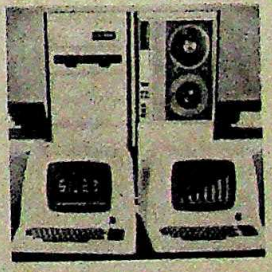
Investigation ● Page 88



Madhya Pradesh

Villagers growing trees on their agricultural land in the hilly tracts of Madhya Pradesh have been cheated of lakhs of rupees by greedy contractors, officials and politicians. Illiterate and unaware of current market prices, they are being paid abysmally low prices for their products while the contractors rake in the loot. An investigation into the exploitation.

Special Feature ● Page 102



Computers

The computer business, till recently, was small and insignificant. But all that seems to be changing, with the market dotted with new manufacturers, the availability of imported components, lower duties and cheaper products. And if the pace is maintained, the country seems poised to finally enter the computer age. A look at what the market has to offer.

Business ● Page 117



Ghazals

Ghazals have at long last emerged from the kothas of Lucknow and the drawing-rooms of aristocrats to face the commercial music world and eager audiences. With this changing trend has emerged a crop of young ghazal singers, who are not only commercial successes in India but have broken boundaries and made it on the music markets internationally.

The Arts ● Page 145

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THIS is not an obituary. For a spirit as free and alive as Prabha Dutt's, it would somehow be sacrilegious. It is instead, a tribute. To a journalist who set standards of professionalism, integrity and ability for others to follow. To a woman who by the force of her personality commanded a degree of respect seldom given to others. To a colleague who, in the tragically short period of her stay in INDIA TODAY, *revealed that beneath the rough surface of a hardened reporter was a soul as sensitive as any. And finally to the memory of a person who was able, in just a short while, to ignite a rare spark of affection and camaraderie among those she worked with.*

Prabha Dutt who died in New Delhi on March 1, after a severe cerebral haemorrhage came to INDIA TODAY *on January 7 this year. Her very first act was typical of the kind of reporter she was. Teaming up with a photographer, she caught the first available plane to Patna and drove out to Piparia where a dozen children had been massacred in a gruesome gang war. After a non-stop effort over two days, Prabha handed in her story even as she walked into the office before going home for her first good rest since leaving for Bihar. Meeting a tight deadline, she enabled* INDIA TODAY *to be the first magazine to bring out the shame and horror of Piparia.*

Prabha always called a spade a spade. Her determination to pursue a story rose in direct proportion to the difficulty of getting it. Her own particular interest was in the condition of society around her, in the condition of her people and the condition of their institutions. We had great expectations of her. Having already made a mark, she was busy mapping a course which would give her more challenging stories. She was working on a whole range from the vexed question of reservations to the state of medical research in the country. Ironically, the day she was admitted to hospital, February 24, she was scheduled to make a visit anyway to do some interviews.

Others who worked with her through the 19 years that she was at The Hindustan Times *have testified to Prabha's tenacity and courage, to her concerns as wife and mother and her home life which she protected zealously, refusing to allow her hectic working schedule to intrude. The many who mourned her sudden passing are a testament to her standing in the profession and the personal regard she commanded. And* INDIA TODAY *joins them in paying tribute to a rare personality whose promising life was so rudely cut short and who will be sadly missed not only by her grieving family but by legions of friends, colleagues and readers.*



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THE DIRECT LINE

It will only be wishful thinking that any agreement can be reached with the so-called moderate Akalis ("Anguish & Anger", March 15). No matter how unpalatable the truth may be but we have to face the fact that Sant Bhindranwale today has a backing of almost 95 per cent of the Sikhs. The Government should talk to him directly to solve the problems.

Ludhiana *Shanti Lal Ahuja*

MRS GANDHI'S TURN

You have rightly observed that the initiative should come from Mrs Gandhi ("Time for Statesmanship", March 15). She first underestimated the situation in Punjab and then neglected it. The tragedy in Assam should have taught her that in such circumstances an early solution can prevent the situation from going out of control. The state Punjab is in today, Mrs Gandhi should take a decision and not go in for discussions and negotiations. She should now forget examining and weighing her party's prospects in the state. And to think that Mrs Gandhi has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, when there is anything but peace in her own country.

Ahmedabad *Ketan Yagnik*

EXTREME STEPS

The article "Subtle Shifts" (March 15) was thought-provoking and made interesting reading. Its subtle bias towards the business community came loud and clear. I do agree that the decisions about the public sector should be less politically motivated, but in a country like ours which is already fraught with so many inequalities and disparities, doing away with the public sector and the Planning Commission would defeat the very purpose we cherish. Instead of proposing such extreme solutions we should look for prudent ways to improve the management of the public sector, the efficiency and credibility of the Planning Commission.

Allahabad *Munish Jauhari*

IRREGULAR BANKS

Your investigation "The Sethia Saga" (March 15) subtly conveyed the meaning that our banking industry has more to fear from the white-collared thugs within than the dacoits. The ease with which the banks flout the rules and the release into private hands of crores of rupees, raises serious doubts about the existence of preventive safeguards at all to curb such financial irregularities. That "it should have taken the RBI so long to react" accentuates the fact that everything is amiss with the present three-tier inspection mechanism consisting of inspectors, internal auditors and external statutory auditors.

Bangalore *P.B. Ramesh*

■ The investigation by your correspondent reveals only the tip of the iceberg of the state of affairs in the banking industry. The attitude of those put in charge of colossal public money is revealed in B.V. Sonalker's statement "we should not probe banking deals like we do in cases of licences and other commercial deals". Are lending operations of banks not commercial deals? Probably what Sonalker is referring to is 'deals within deals'. The Government should not reward such people with extentions.

Delhi *Ashok K. Mittal*

KASHMIR IMBROGLIO

Although the whole cover story was informative (February 29) I would like to point out a few errors in the item titled "Al-Fatah Angle". It is not a fact that I was provided or given a job by the late Sheikh Abdullah. I was not silenced by the offer of a job from the Government. I had a government job prior to my involvement with Al-Fatah. When the Government took back the Al-Fatah case in 1975, I and my friends were reinstated automatically as provided under the service rules. I also want to make it clear that I am out of politics now because of personal reasons.

Jammu *Fazal Haq*

■ The former high commissioner in London N.G. Goray has stated that the KLA has been active for the past several years and that he too received threats while there. And one thing that cannot be overlooked here is that when terrorists have stalked the streets in the past why has the Indian Government not taken action? Should the loss of a precious life alone invite action?

Karur *K. Baskar*

■ Had Maqbool Butt been hanged earlier on, according to the final verdict, Mhatre's assassination could have been avoided. The External Affairs Ministry and the presidential office should give answers to this. Till then they have to share the blame.

Sangli *Dr G.V. Tase*

■ Within a week of the Mhatre murder, Butt was hanged—an act of revenge on the part of the Government. A person who spent almost half his life in jail was the victim of a crime committed by others. The Government took advantage of the situation and Congressmen started accusing Dr Farooq Abdullah for the murder. But they have not been successful, and it has proved that they cannot kill two birds with one stone. I cannot figure out how anyone has gained from the deaths of Mhatre and Butt.

Srinagar *Rafi Ahmed Togoo*

■ The article has projected a clear picture that the Congress (I) leadership has called Dr Farooq Abdullah a secessionist while they are themselves anti-national. The Congress(I) workers here were, on February 17, forcing shopkeepers to down shutters, in protest against the hanging of Maqbool Butt. Their only motto seems to be to gain power by hook or by crook.

Srinagar *Khalida Bano*
Sushma Nehru

RITUAL SITTINGS

Your comment "The Decline of Debate" (February 29) could not have come at a better time. It is really unfortunate that the Parliament sittings have been reduced to a mere ritual. The members who get elected should realise that they are the servants of the people who elected them and not vice versa. Instead of their calling on the people to do something for the country at the time when it is passing through a critical phase, they will do well to set an example by doing something. It is time that Parliament passed a resolution whereby a member would draw his full salary and other allowances only if he attends 90 per cent of the sittings.

Madras *K.N. Krishnamoorthy*

■ The comment is informative to the extent of convincing the readers of the dearth of obstinacy in our present day MP's. But it is unwise to expect them to debate on behalf of the people—who sent them to Parliament—in a time when they are no more either parliamentarians or people's representatives, but merely 'politicians'.

Trivandrum *P. Vijaya Chandran*

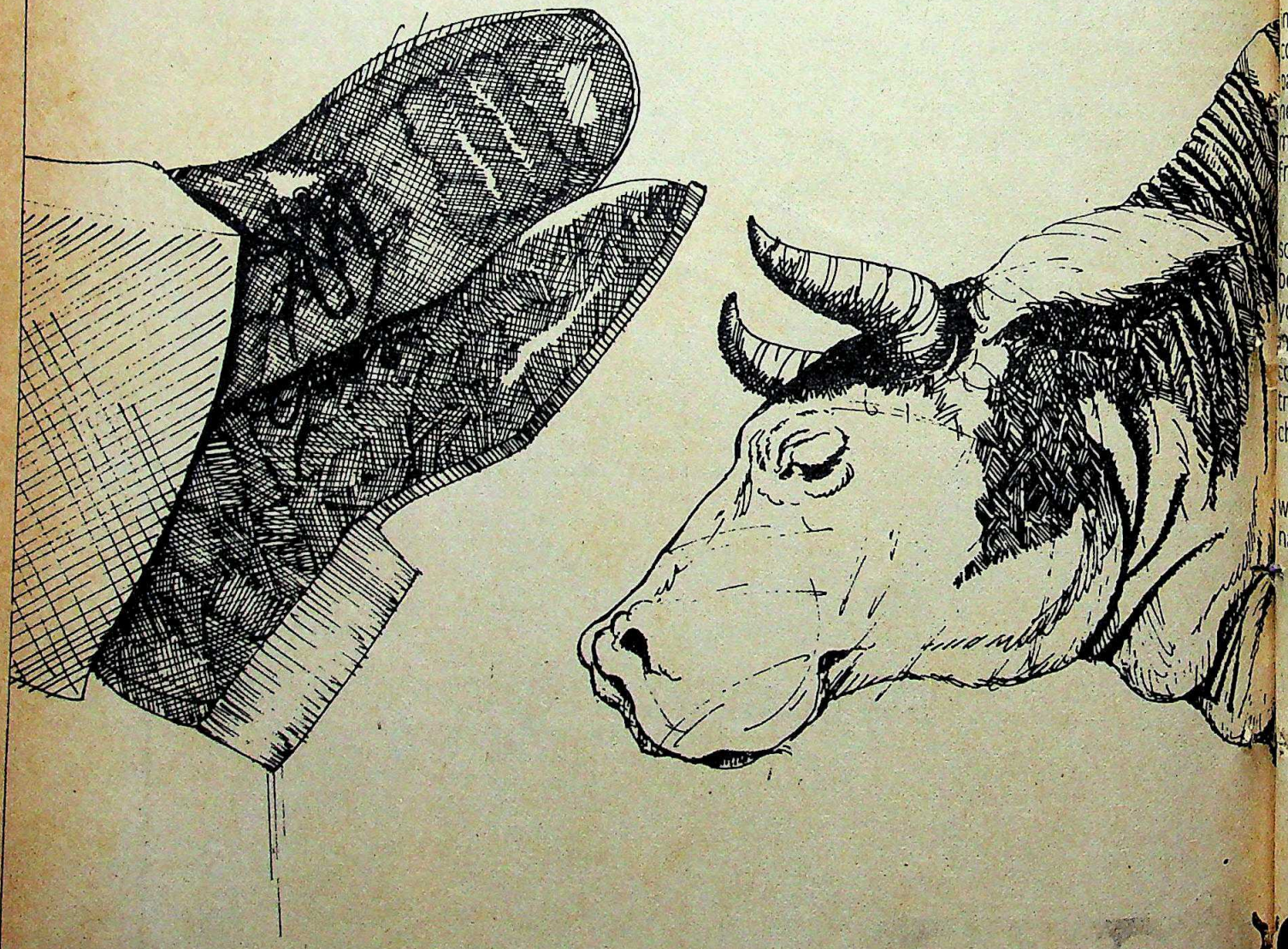
SEN'S SENSITIVITY

A great director unfortunately for himself, sets a high standard of expectation. When one goes to see a Mrinal Sen film, one does not go expecting the typical pot-boiler. But *Khandhar* with all its media buildup is such a film. A film about urban insensitivity to rural realities could not possibly have been made more insensitively. Isn't it biased to say it was Sen's probable best? Maybe Sethi has not seen *Ek Din Pratidin* or even

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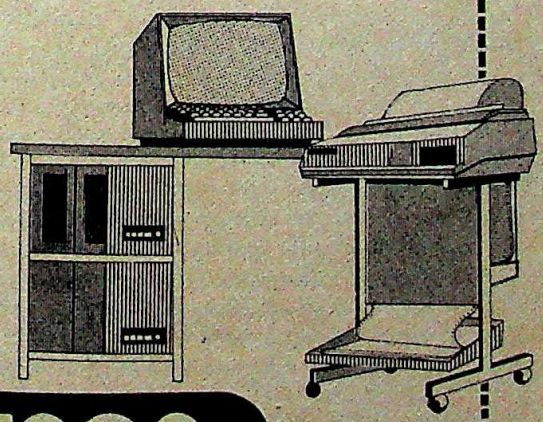
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Akaler Sandhane, both "poems of understated delicacy" which were anyway much better. Mention should have been made of Premendra Mitra whose story *Telenapota Avishkar* was the main theme. That INDIA TODAY has fallen down in review standards in this manner is truly disheartening.

Calcutta *Joydeep Bhattacharya*

■ This refers to "Brawl on the Beach" (February 29). Any act of religious fanaticism, whether on the part of Hindus, Muslims, Christians or any other religious community, should be severely condemned and fanatics brought to book.

Bangalore *K. Subhash Kumar*

FORGOTTEN SOLDIERS

Your article "Missing" (February 29) has exposed the indifference of the Indian Government to the plight of Indian POW's who are languishing in Pakistani jails. The political failure of India to enforce the Geneva Convention is appalling. What a set of double standards we have. We built monuments in memory of the Unknown Soldier while well-known soldiers are forgotten.

Bombay *P.B. Ramesh*

LANGUAGE PROBLEMS

Hindi has been referred to as the national language of India in "Playing on Words" (February 29). Nowhere in our constitution has it been said that Hindi is our national language. On the other hand, Hindi has only been referred to as the official language of the Indian Union vide Article 343 (1). 'Official' means for the purposes of the offices of government for carrying on the administration. Our Constitution has recognised 14 other Indian languages like Tamil, apart from Hindi, and so, all these 15 languages should rightly be termed our national languages henceforth.

Madras *Geetha Udaya Kumar*

ACERBIC INTERVIEW

I was shocked to read the interview of Subramaniam Swamy (February 29). It is extraordinary to say that if he is becoming president of Janata Party 50 per cent of the BJP will join the Janata. Can he also add that 90 per cent of the Janata members will quit when he becomes president? According to him if he is chosen president it is democratic and if Chandra Shekhar is chosen it is undemocratic.

Pant Nagar *Sachidanand Tiwari*

NEW MOVEMENT

With reference to the article "Running Out of Ideas" (February 29) I am in complete agreement with Dr Dubashi. India is begging for a new centralist political movement, in other words, neo-liberalism. The country needs, as the Americans would say, a lean, clean, fighting machine of a political organisation.

But needing is not enough. Where have our pragmatic, efficient, effective and dynamic technocrats gone? They should be taking over the political arena instead of the wishy-washy ideologues. I hope it's just a matter of time.

Bahrain *Anant Sahay*

UNREAL GOALS

"Running out of Ideas", "Brawl on the Beach", and "Playing on Words" all in the February 29 issue have one clear pointer —how our political leadership, whatever ideologies they have, aided to some extent by the bureaucracy are leading the country into darkness playing down the realities. The weapons in their hands are religion, poverty and social emotions. Unless the people of our country wake up and demand from their leaders total sanity, security and sincerity, they are going to be doomed—economically, socially and intellectually.

Ahmedabad *J.V. Venkatesh Murthy*

POWER PROJECT

While analysing the Korba project order ("Mixed Readings", February 29) your correspondent seems to have ignored some of the basic facts: that Instrumentation's offer was the lowest; ILK's Contronic 3 system offered for Korba is the most sophisticated system; the indigenous content in our bid was the highest; as for ILK's performance notwithstanding the facts that ILK to its credit has more than 100 power stations, the two plants operating in India today with the highest plant load factor are Vijayawada and Singrauli both based on ILK's C&I equipment.

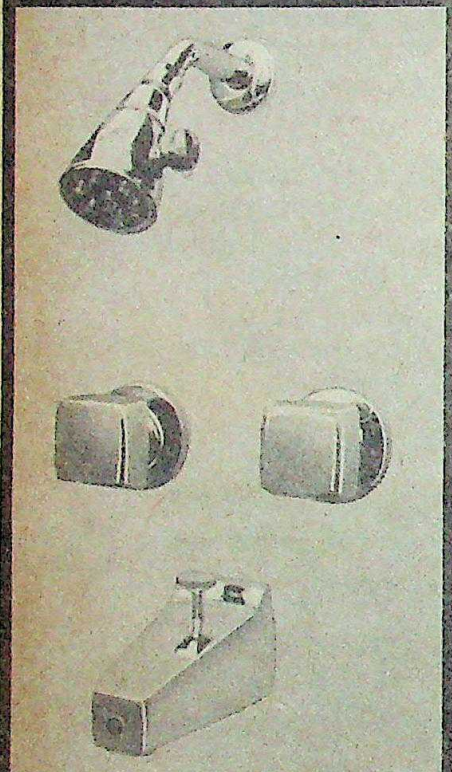
Kota *Girish Chandra*
public relations manager, ILK

ZIA'S ATTITUDE

Referring to the interview with Benazir Bhutto (February 15) one finds it difficult to fathom the wisdom of our government and the press siding with people hysterically opposed to General Zia. So far as the relations between the two countries are concerned, the period since Zia took over should be admitted as one with the least tension and animosity. Compared to the harsh views and designs Bhutto harboured against India and the contribution he made to the crippling wars that erupted between the two countries, Zia's attitude towards us cannot but be called harmless. It is a pity that even after decades of self-government we are yet to be adept in diplomacy. General Zia despite being a dictator does not appear to be holding any evil designs against us.

Madras *M.R. Anand*

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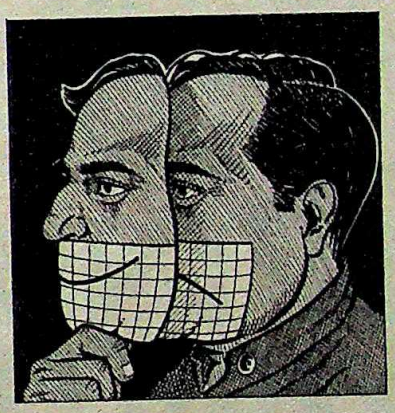
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INDIA TODAY
THE COMPLETE NEWSMAGAZINE

Delusions of Growth

RECENT weeks have seen much self-congratulation by the Government on economic matters, suggesting not only that things are generally in the pink, but also that the economy's performance has been far better in the last four years than ever before, implying in the process that it has broken through to a higher growth path. This is simply not true. If anything, the Government and the planners should be worried about the plethora of missed targets and the disturbing signs of an economic slow-down.

In his budget speech, Pranab Mukherjee took credit for an average growth in national income of 5.4 per cent in the first four years of the sixth plan—"higher than the first four years of any previous plan," he noted. He also talked of a "major breakthrough in foodgrains production" and saw in this "convincing testimony to the soundness of our agricultural strategy". Finally, he pointed with pride to the fact that plan investment during 1980-85 would be over Rs 110,000 crore—not only higher than the initial target of Rs 97,500 crore but also a magnificent jump over the plan investment of Rs 46,700 crore in the preceding five-year period. The Planning Commission has also taken credit for being about to hit the sixth plan's overall economic growth rate of 5.2 per cent—for the first time in three decades.



To start with, even though the Government claims that the overall economic growth target is likely to be reached, if not exceeded, agriculture is likely to fall short of the goals set while industry will register even greater shortfalls. The increase in power generation capacity will be missed by 33 per cent, coal production by 20 per cent, and steel output by more than either of these. The growth in railway traffic, meanwhile, has been only half of what was hoped for. The overall rate of industrial growth is likely to be 5.5 per cent—well short of the 8 per cent target. Indeed, the 8 per cent target for industry has been crossed in only one of the first four years of the plan. If, despite these, the overall growth target is likely to be reached, it can be only because of growth in tertiary sectors like construction—no substitute for more solid performances in industry and agriculture.

The most worrying sector of the economy is the one where a "major breakthrough" has been claimed—agriculture. While it is true that this year's bumper harvest of around 142 million tonnes is many granaries ahead of the previous best (133 million tonnes, two years ago), there is no getting away from the fact that foodgrain production has slowed down. Between two peak years, 1978-79 and 1983-84, food output rose 10 million tonnes, from 132 to 142 million tonnes. This is an annual average growth of just 1.5 per cent—well short of the population growth rate of 2.2 per cent. Far from an agricultural breakthrough, we have a drop in the per capita availability of foodgrain over the last five years, as the official economic survey itself admits, and the overall agricultural growth rates are only 60 per cent of what was achieved earlier. We have had large-scale good imports for three years running totalling 9 million tonnes so far with talk now of imports for the fourth successive year.

THERE are other problems too: in government budgeting, for instance. The revised budget figures for 1983-84 show a deficit of Rs 1,695 crore—more or less in line with the original projection of Rs 1,586 crore. But if one looks beyond this end-figure, what emerges is a picture of budgetary chaos, and runaway expenditures that spell the almost complete failure of fiscal control. The deficit has been reduced to presentable proportions only because of three fortuitous factors: an unexpected bonus from oil surpluses totalling Rs 1,100 crore, a similar bonanza of Rs 500 crore from small savings receipts, and a last-minute cut in expenditure by Rs 1,500 crore. Without these, the deficit would have been close to Rs 5,000 crore—and no finance minister could have admitted to such a figure without being in danger of getting hooted out of the house. Yet the fact remains that spending did go haywire.

That is not the end of the list of problems: exports remain sluggish, wasteful and avoidable imports continue, the trade deficit remains worryingly large, inflation is once again a major headache, and domestic industry remains both high-cost and uncompetitive, while also growing steadily obsolete.

The overall growth rates that have been claimed since 1980 also need to be put into perspective: they use as their point of comparison the year 1979-80, when food production dropped an almost unprecedented 17 per cent and national income slumped 4.8 per cent. This gives an artificial boost to the subsequent growth rates, a ballast that disappears if the base of comparison is taken as 1978-79. The real economic growth rate then is revealed as being no more than 3.5 per cent—the traditional "Hindu rate of growth" that has persisted for two decades.

This should be cause for worry for the simple reason that the economy is saving and investing a steadily greater part of its total income—roughly 23 per cent now, which is more than double the level three decades ago. Logically, this should lead to faster growth rates. If these have not materialised, something is clearly wrong with the basic management of the economy. And P.R. Brahmananda, the Bombay-based economist, gives a clue to the central problem in what should be a watershed study of productivity in the Indian economy. Industrial productivity, he shows, more or less stagnated during the '60s, and then actually declined by a horrifying 15 per cent during the '70s—when productivity ratios were improving in most other countries. Instead of going forward, Indian industry is stepping back.

In simpler terms, what this means is that money that is invested in various projects is not yielding enough production—because of project delays, large cost overruns, and poor capacity utilisation. India is short of two primary requirements—time and money. Yet we spend both as though there was some inexhaustible bank to be tapped. And now the Government pretends that the serious problems that have resulted from this can be disguised by statistical sleight of hand. This might be understandable in what promises to be a pre-election year of posturing and fiscal profligacy, but it is not the truth as it should be told.

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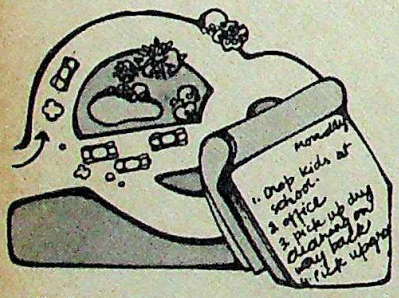
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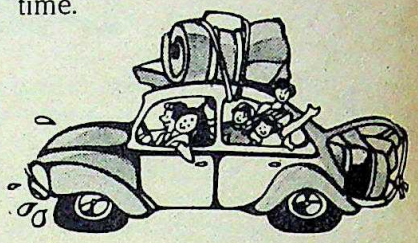
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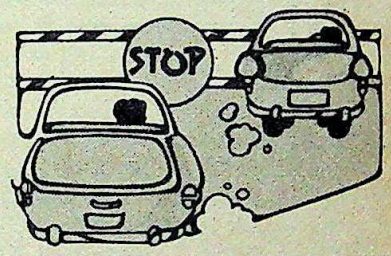
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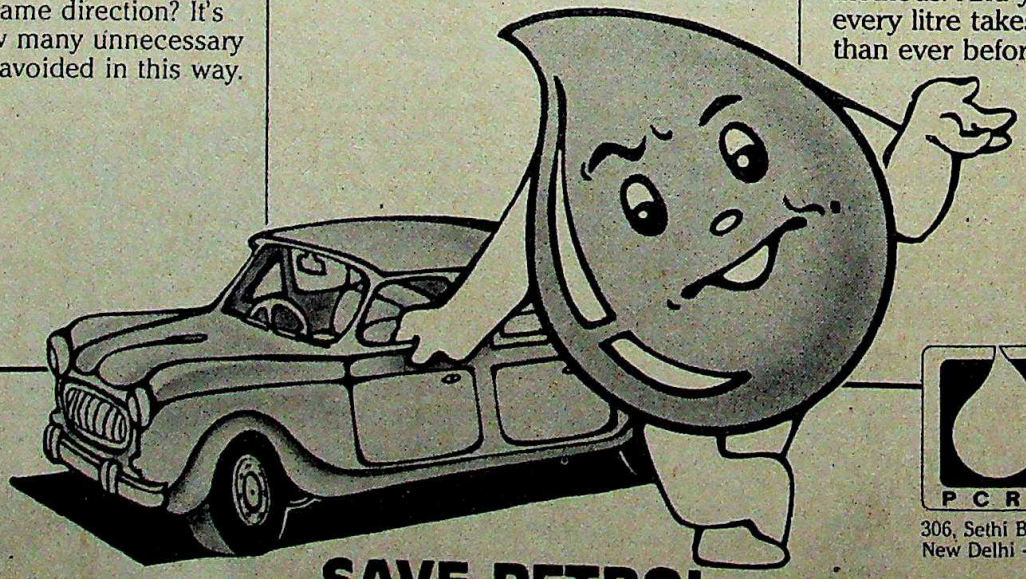
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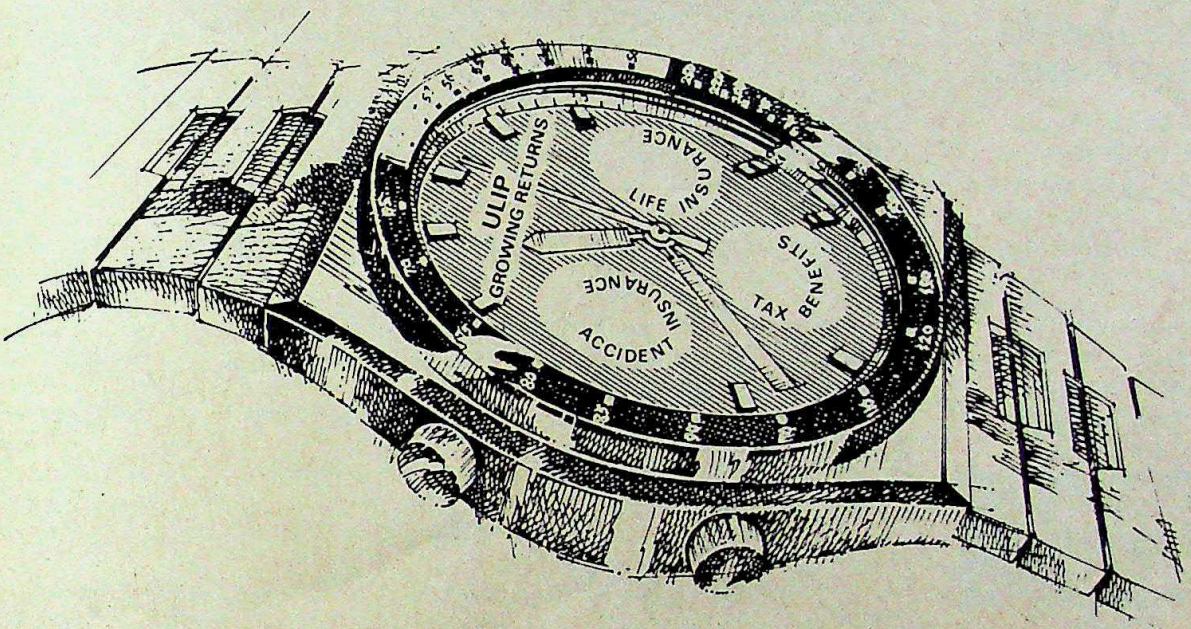
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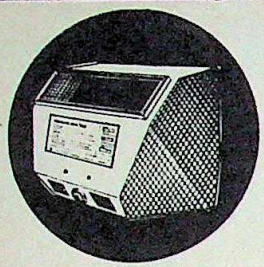
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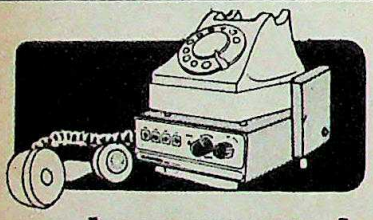


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VOICES

➤ I find it very easy to talk to Mrs Gandhi... we understand the combination of the pull of family and the total dedication to politics... I don't think any woman in power ... really has a life unless she has got a large number of women friends.
—*Mrs Margaret Thatcher in an interview to* BBC World Service

➤ Everybody is a born Sikh... The real image of god is a Sikh. It is the scissors which make a man non-Sikh.
—*Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale in* Current

➤ She (Mrs Gandhi) merely expects all other (opposition) parties to become her camp followers, which is not acceptable to us.
—*C. Rajeswara Rao to newsmen in New Delhi*

➤ We find ourselves saddled with a bunch of nitwits suffering from high blood pressure, bad temper and eyes that cannot see beyond their noses... (a) gang of thugs described by our government and newspapers as extremists.
—*Khushwant Singh in* The Hindustan Times

➤ No one with self-respect could remain in the Congress(I)... Mrs Gandhi has been playing a drama for years. —*Dr Channa Reddy in Vijayawada*

➤ He (Nehru) did not formulate a 20-point programme to subvert political and administrative morality. But, today, corruption has become a badge of patriotism like secularism, socialism and non-alignment.
—*K.R. Sunder Rajan in* The Sunday Observer

➤ To avoid recurrence of such problems, Sir, why don't you ask Mr Ghani Khan (Choudhury) to keep his mouth shut so that nobody can put words into his mouth.
—*Indrajit Gupta,* CPI, *to Lok Sabha Speaker in Parliament*

➤ The galloping rate of sycophancy in our country is higher than the growth of inflation. —*P.B. in* The Tribune

➤ In all courts of kings there have always been the brothers, sisters, uncles and nephews trying to blow each other out... It's just the same history being repeated in a modern sense. Now those rajas are gone: we are the rajas of the day, democratically elected. —*Farooq Abdullah in* Express Magazine

➤ The problem with censorship is that it destroys criticism. When you're accepted, you don't know why you are accepted. When you're rejected you don't know why you're rejected.
—*Salman Rushdie in* The Indian Express

➤ It (investigative journalism) is the biggest bullshit of our time. We have reached the gutter level. In fact, what was gutter journalism yesterday is investigative reporting today. When I exposed Morarji when he was at the peak of his power, I was called names. Arun Shourie exposed a small chap like Antulay, for which he got international awards.
—*R.K. Karanjia in* Probe India

➤ Rusi's (Karanjia) strength has never been his commitment to ideas or ideologies, rather it has been his feel for the public pulse and his muck-raking ability.
—*Vir Sanghvi in* The Illustrated Weekly of India

➤ I wish I had been a journalist in Madhubala's time. It would have been a challenge to strip a *pardanashin*. Instead here I am with heroines, who are not only stripped nude but are ready to be raped to attract attention.
—*Devyani Chaubal in* Movie

➤ I am still a virgin. And I will remain one till the day I get married—unless I am raped or something. —*Padmini Kolhapure in* Stardust

➤ Rekha is an irresponsible and cheeky person. I don't like her at all. She's very, very moody. She didn't have these moods when she was starving.
—*Prakash Mehra in* Cine Blitz

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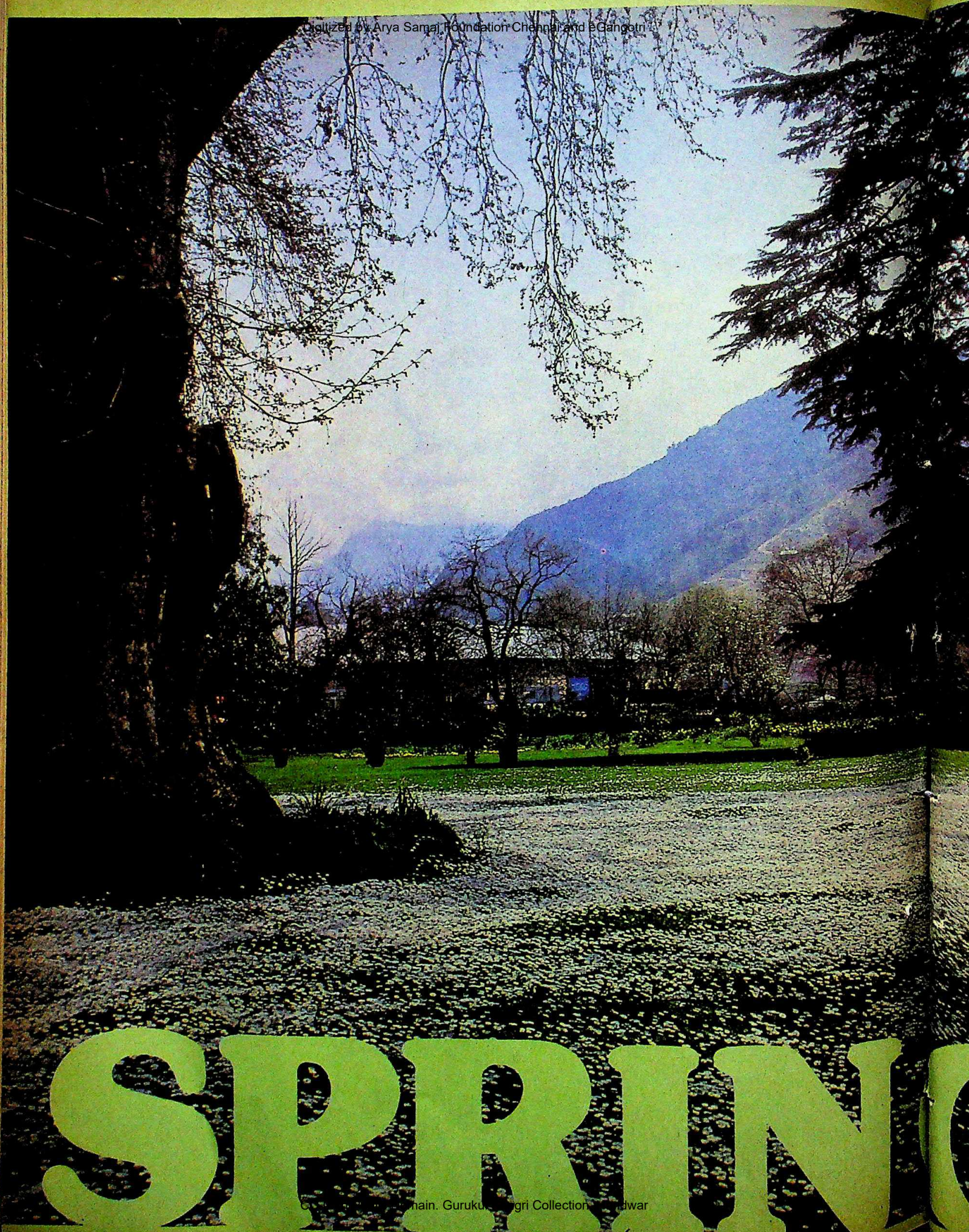
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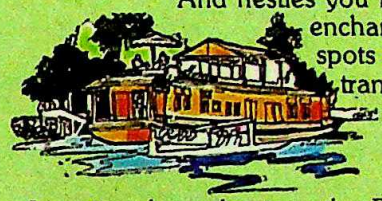


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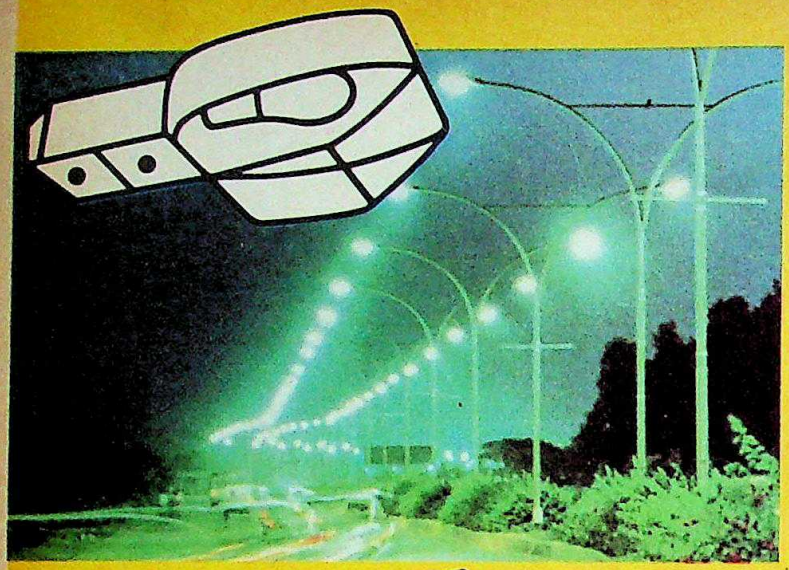
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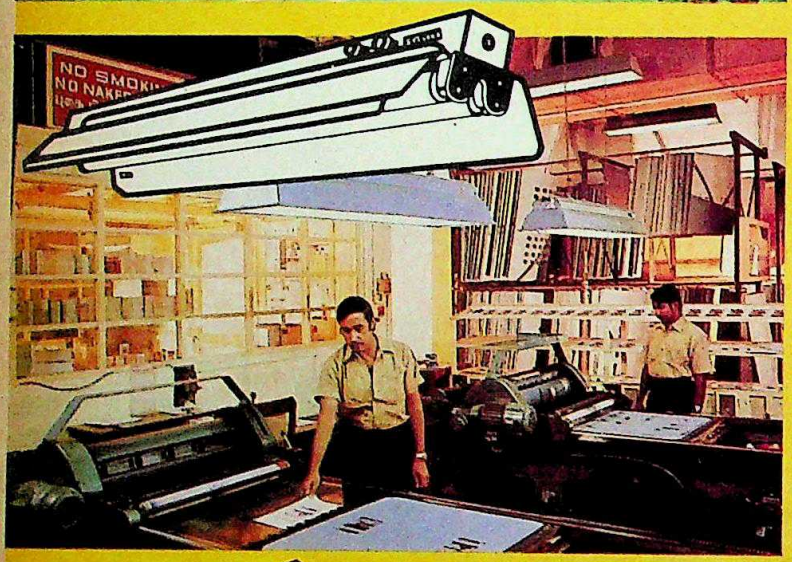
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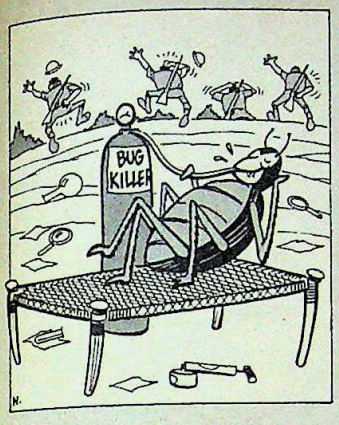
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SUPERBUG

■ Of all the insects which make life hell for anyone wanting to take a nap or a good sleep, the bedbug is probably the most effective. Not as flamboyant as the mosquito, and far more efficient than a cockroach, the mighty mite would have made Kumbhakarna leap out of his historic snooze and vigorously massage his mattress.

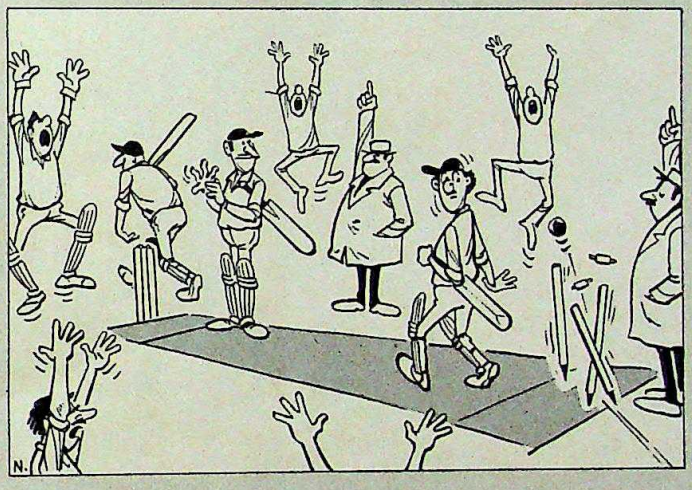
Last month, even jawans admitted defeat. At a barracks in Pune, medical officers set out to test a bug spray called dichlorovos. They began by counting the bedbugs from five selected charpoys— shaking the bugs out by dropping the charpoys from a height of one ft onto a white sheet. As the *Medical Journal* says: "The average density of bedbugs including nymphs and adults was worked out." Then the charpoys were heavily sprayed with the wonder bug spray, dichlorovos.

Thereafter, the charpoy bouncing and the spraying rituals were gone through a fortnight later, and then every month for three months. Obviously, the bugs had a merry time all through, for the *Journal* concluded sadly after the experiment: "Dichlorovos proved ineffective in the control of bedbugs."

STUMPED

■ Cricket, in the threadbare phrase spouted by commentators when they can't think of anything else to say, is a game of glorious uncertainties. How glorious the uncertainties can be was made clear at a local tournament in a town near Nagpur recently.

In the course of the day, a batsman received a ball that appeared to believe it was at a discotheque: one thing led to another and in the end, the batsman had to watch mortified as the ball landed safely in a fielder's hands. "Howzzat!" "Out!" Then began the long walk back to the pavilion.



So did the other long walk from the pavilion to the crease. The replacement was very eager to get out there, so he was halfway into the field split seconds after the appeal. The other batsman left his crease to talk to the newcomer.... "Howzzat!" cried the fielder, after scattering the stumps. "Out!" quoth the umpire. That's called getting two birds with one stone.

FISHY STORY

■ Near the town of Pondicherry there is a small hamlet called Muthialpet, enchantingly hemmed in by coconut palms. It is a fishermen's village and for the last few days, the talk around the barbecue blaze has been of the one that got away.

One evening wiry young Durai caught a fish: it was a whopper. It measured 16.5 ft from tail to nose and, though the fishermen who gathered around to gape had no suitable weighing-machine, old-timers put the fellow's weight at 2 tonnes. Even though his net had been ripped apart by the catch, Durai couldn't stop beaming and went off to negotiate with a merchant.



They struck a deal at Rs 2,500. The merchant said he would come the next morning with a truck to pick the fish up. When Durai and his client arrived at dawn, however, the beach was empty. When he had torn most of his hair out, Durai learnt from the wise old man of the village that such fishes could stay alive out of water for hours; the spray had most probably revived it, and it had managed to drag itself to the sea. Durai is now confining himself to smaller fry who have no penchant for the disappearing act.

CLEAN SWEEP

■ The corridors of power are studies in mysterious half-light, where anonymous men and women carry files to and fro. In India the picture undergoes considerable modification: add any number of paan-stained peons, the rustle of rumpled khadi, the litter of unused furniture that waits in ambush at odd corners.

In Bombay at least, the image has changed. The Mantralaya houses the offices of the state Government and used to be a bureaucrat's paradise—rustling khadi, paan-stained peons and decrepit furniture falling apart at the seams present in abundance. Not any more. As the secretary for administrative reforms announced proudly last fortnight, brushing a stray cobweb from his shirt, spring-cleaning is in full swing. In the first phase the corridors were cleared of 1,047 cupboards, 274 broken tables, 172 chairs, 93 racks and 68 other articles contemptuously labelled dead stock! When the chaprasis stop sneezing, they are reportedly going to make for the rooms with their brooms and brushes: not to sweep away the people inside, of course; that would be asking for too much.

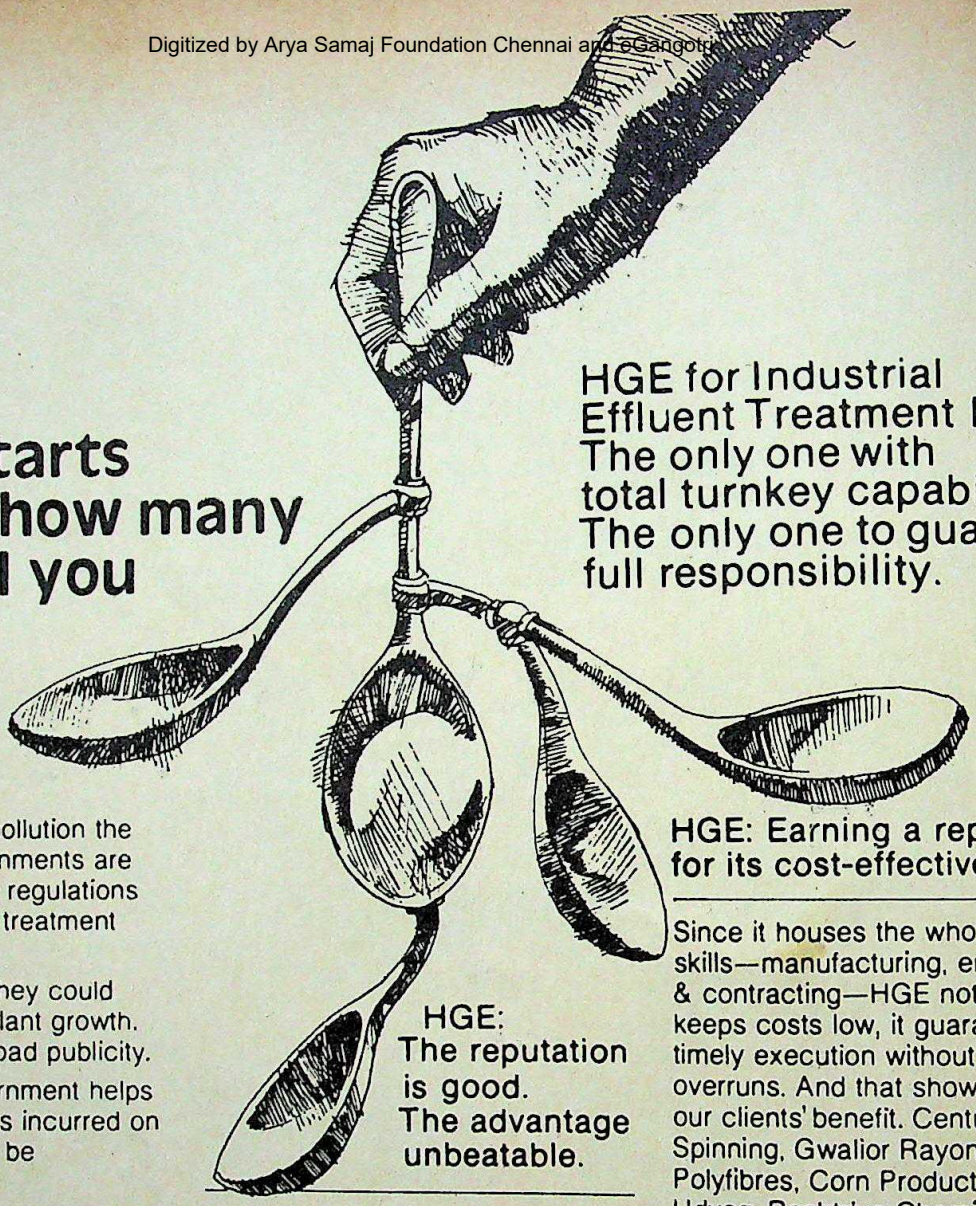


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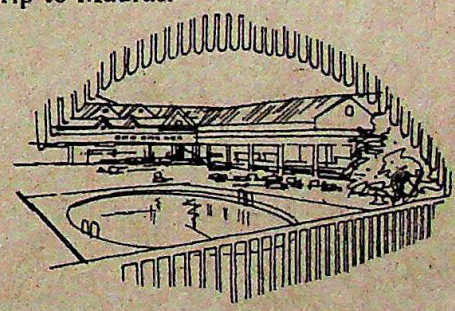
Originally the property of the Nawab of Wallajah (late 18th century), it later belonged to the family of John Binny, founder of Binny and Co.

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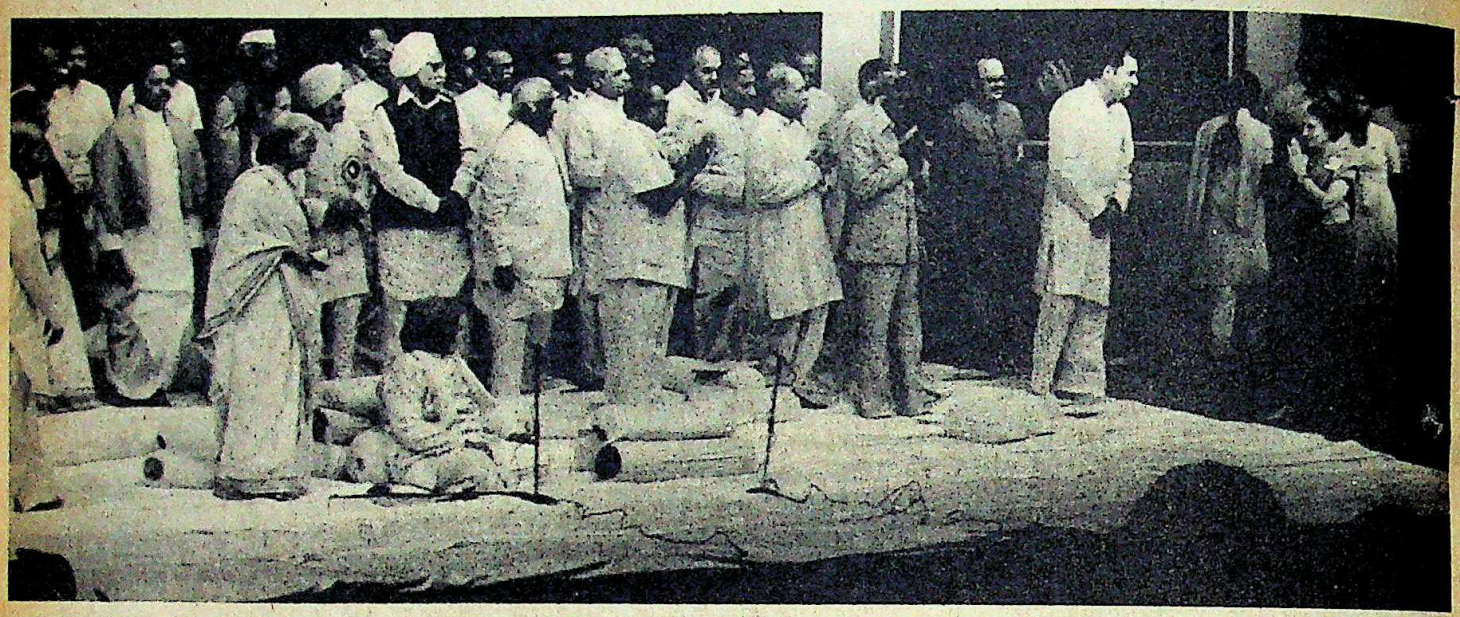
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PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Mrs Gandhi greets her partymen: searching questions

CONGRESS(I)

Election Exercise

IT LOOKED like an employment exchange—only on a much larger scale. At the convention of Congress(I) MP's and state legislators—the first of its kind—last fortnight, over 3,000 worried men huddled in tense groups waiting for a 15-minute interview. Inside the four rectangular halls at the sprawling Asian Games complex, 50 senior party leaders, including a dozen-odd Union ministers, perused 3,000 files containing 20,000 papers.

After the three-day jamboree, the 17 Congress(I) chief ministers, 360 MP's and 3,000 MLA's and MLC's returned to their respective homes somewhat unsure of their political future. But in New Delhi, their leaders were jubilant. G.K. Moopanar, AICC(I) general secretary, said: "The feedback from elected representatives has helped the party leadership in getting a first-hand assessment of the performance of the Congress(I) governments in various states, the shortcomings of the Opposition and the extent of the Congress(I)'s popularity."

The New Delhi convention was the grand finale to the mass contact drive launched after the Calcutta session of the party. In her concluding address, the party's President, Mrs Gandhi, had directed all MP's MLA's, MLC's and PCC(I) office-bearers to go to the grass roots and address a minimum number of public meetings (INDIA TODAY, January 31).

Apparently, the only exception was Mrs Gandhi, who could not visit Medak, her constituency in Andhra Pradesh, owing to preoccupations in New Delhi. At the convention, however, she was interviewed by Pranab Mukherjee about the party's prospects in Medak, while P. Shiv Shankar questioned Rajiv about Amethi.

Earlier, Mrs Gandhi had set up five high-powered zonal committees to assess the legislators' reports. The committees, headed by Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, External Affairs Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, Commerce Minister, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, Energy Minister P. Shiv Shankar and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Buta Singh, were given a brief to "look into the organisational and political situation of the states".

Some prominent Rajya Sabha members, state level leaders and Union ministers were asked to help with preliminary studies and they sent individual reports on the legislators to the AICC(I) headquarters. After screening all these reports, the zonal chiefs, assisted by some others, began the cross-examinations. The five zonal committees were split up into 25 sub-panels and each of them spent over 14 hours daily interviewing at least a hundred people.

Before the session began, Mrs Gandhi unfurled the Congress(I) flag and spoke for 35 minutes in Hindi and 15 minutes in English on, among other things, the Opposition challenge and the need for unity. Thus she set the tone for the panels to begin their task of preparing a report on the current political situation for her.

While the panel chiefs took to their onerous task with a will, the participants too were fully prepared. They had brought along newspaper clippings, copies of their correspondence with state authorities and records of their tours to buttress their earlier reports. Subhash Yadav, a Lok Sabha member from Madhya Pradesh, said: "Those who seriously followed the high command's directive did not face any problem. The idea was to make the high command aware of the problems of each constituency."

The panel members did not accept the reports at face value. To cross-check claims made by MP's, they invited each MLA from the parliamentary constituency to give their versions of the political scenario. While MLA's and MP's were being interviewed, state chief ministers were asked to wait in a separate room for consultations on important issues.

If the nature of the questions (*see box*) was any indication, the real purpose of the jamboree was to assess the electoral prospects in each of the 542 Lok Sabha constituencies and gauge the extent of dissidence. The party, it seems, is not banking on Mrs Gandhi's charisma to carry it through the next elections.

The coming polls will be won by individual candidates in their own right. The high command is therefore concerned, more than ever before, about the personal image and capacity of each candidate. The entire exercise, as one leader admitted, was aimed at screening present parliamentarians to mark out possible losers as well as search for likely replacements. The other major concern of the high command was to measure dissidence and explore steps to contain it.

Over 100 MLA's from Uttar Pradesh, led by R.K. Bhargawa, made a concerted move against Chief Minister Sripat Misra. While Bhargawa refused to divulge his charges against Misra, his colleagues maintained that the Congress(I) would suffer a humiliating defeat if Misra continued in office. In

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similar vein, four MLA's from Rajasthan spoke against their Chief Minister, Shiv Charan Mathur, and the growing corruption in the state.

Among the participants from Maharashtra, there was a deep rift between the pro-chief minister and pro-Antulay lobbies. Indeed, there was hardly a state whose legislators did not complain either against each other or their chief minister. The internecine hatred ran so deep that the attempt to lodge MLA's in MP's houses and flats was met with stubborn non-cooperation.

SOME MLA's from Kanpur, for example, were asked to stay with Arif Mohammed Khan, Union minister of state for agriculture, but they preferred to share rooms with three others in the Uttar Pradesh Bhavan. Finally, hardly 100 MLA's stayed with MP's. Even chief ministers and other ministers took rooms in five-star hotels. Jagdish Tytler, who was in charge of the accommodation, said: "We had made arrangements at all the Congress(I) MP's houses. If some of them did not go there, it was their personal problem."

If the legislators' reports on Opposition prospects are any indication, the Congress(I) is in for a landslide victory. Since the MP's evidently thought that adverse reports would go against them, each of them painted a rosy picture of his or her area.

While MLA's from Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu firmly held that the charismatic appeal of both N.T. Rama Rao and MGR was on the wane, MLA's from Uttar Pradesh did not consider Maneka Gandhi's fledgling Sanjay Vichar Manch (SVM) worth worrying about. An MLA from Sultanpur district stated in his report that the "SVM has some influence in the district because our own party workers are supporting them. Otherwise she will not win a single seat from the district." The report on party prospects was obviously meant for Rajiv Gandhi.

The convention was not meant only for questioning the legislators. Besides exhibitions depicting the Congress(I)'s history and its role in the freedom struggle, they were treated to 12 lectures delivered on various political subjects.

The choice of speakers was interesting. S.M. Krishna, Union minister of state for finance, spoke on human rights and Y.B. Chavan—who left South Block a decade ago—enlightened the delegates on the international situation. Bali Ram Bhagat, former Lok Sabha speaker, was listed to deal with South Asia while Dinesh Singh, former foreign minister, was chosen to speak on developing countries. No more than 200 people were ever present for the lectures. An MLA from Uttar Pradesh said: "Who is interested in these lectures when our own political careers are at stake? We would rather spend time outside with leaders who matter, to ensure our seats."

To ensure a seat was of course on every mind. As the participants returned home with fingers hopefully crossed, the zonal chiefs sat down with their aides to prepare a comprehensive report. This is by no means an easy task. After 50 hours of interviews, a cabinet minister ruefully admitted: "I now have a thousand more files to dispose of and solve the political puzzle. I wish I had the bureucrats to solve this too."—PRABHU CHAWLA

INTERVIEWS

Talking Point

THE 50-odd questions put to each of 3,000 Congress(I) MP's and MLA's were designed to assess individual performance and the party's poll prospects in the parliamentary election. The questions were framed by five zonal committees—each headed by a cabinet minister—after extensive talks with party functionaries like Mrs Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. They took in everything from the relative weaknesses and strengths of opposition parties to the impact of development activities on the electorate the chances of opposition unity and the possibility of internal sabotage. Each MP or MLA was grilled individually for 15 to 30 minutes. Some important questions were:

- ► What are the main weak points of the Congress(I) in your constituency?
- ► Is there any infighting; if so, on what basis (give details)?
- ► Is the infighting likely to manifest itself as internal sabotage and affect the Congress(I)'s chances in the next election?
- ► Are the minorities with the Congress(I); if not, why and what should be done to secure their support?
- ► Do you get cooperation of the administrative set-up in your constituency: if not, are they (officers) politically motivated, opposed to Congress(I) or committed to any opposition party or parties?
- ► Which are the main opposition parties in your constituency?
- ► Do you find any possibility of all parties setting up a common candidate against the Congress(I)?
- ► In case of opposition unity, do you also see the possibility of local workers of these parties working together to defeat the Congress(I) or do you foresee any disunity among them?
- ► What are the main talking points available to the Opposition?
- ► What, in your opinion, are the arguments in defence of the Congress(I)?
- ► What are our main talking points against the Opposition and their performance which could be used by the Congress(I) in the constituency?
- ► How is the self-employment scheme announced by the prime minister on August 15, 1983, functioning in your constituency?
- ► Has the Congress(I) got the political benefit of the programme; if not, what are the reasons?
- ► What is your general assessment about your constituency as regards Congress(I) chances in the next election?

Party office-bearers decline to comment on the questionnaire. But it was obvious that the zonal committees will recommend various policy and administrative actions to the high command which would boost the ruling party's electoral prospects. In particular, recommendations regarding the bureaucracy if followed up are likely to cause major administrative shake-ups in the districts. Over 100 Congress(I) MLA's from Uttar Pradesh, 40 from Rajasthan and 80 from Madhya Pradesh have named numerous district and police officials who they charge are hostile to the Congress(I). All in all, the questionnaire is likely to make its impact well before the first election poster goes up on the walls.



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Mrs Gandhi receives complaints from MLA's: serious rifts

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RAJYA SABHA

The Two-thirds Question

FOR THE Congress(I), the winning post in the race for absolute parliamentary majority looms only yards away. As biennial elections to 74 of the 232 Rajya Sabha seats were scheduled for March 29, it became clear that the complexion of the House of elders is set to change drastically, leaving the ruling party between six and 10 short of the cherished two-thirds majority. The results are also destined to upstage the Janata Party—its strength tumbling from 21, the second largest till now, to a likely nine. And, with enough members belonging to friendly opposition parties like the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) willing to bridge the gap between simple and absolute majority, Mrs Gandhi, for the first time since 1976, will come really close to enjoying the option of carrying out radical constitutional changes.

The respectable Opposition presence in the Rajya Sabha, a legacy from the 1977-79 period of Janata rule at the Centre and in various states, is also headed for a jolt. The opposition members likely to be axed this time round include heavyweights such as: Vijaye Raje Scindia, vice-president of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP); Bhai Mahavir, Jagannath Rao Joshi and Jagdish Prasad Mathur (all from the BJP); Harkrishen Singh Surjeet (Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M)); Syed Shahabuddin, Era Sezhiyan, Surendra Mohan, M.M.S. Sidhu and Ladli Mohan Nigam (all Janata); A.G. Kulkarni of the Congress(S) and Dinesh Goswami (Independent).

The Congress(I) too has 26 of its members on the retirement list. It now holds 133 Rajya Sabha seats. But the party will gain at least 22 seats after repairing the loss, finishing with around 155 members when 164 are required for two-thirds majority. The stalwarts in the ruling party due to exit now are: Rafiq Zakaria, N.K.P. Salve, K.C. Pant and B.P. Maurya. Simultaneously, the Telugu Desam is likely to make its first appearance in the Upper House, filling at least five of six seats from Andhra Pradesh that will fall vacant.

There is an element of predictability about the outcome of Rajya Sabha elections because candidates are elected on the basis of their parties' strength in the legislative assemblies of the respective states. Unlike the Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha is never dissolved, but a third of its members retire every two years. The number of seats for each state is fixed by a complex calculation in which its population is the key factor. In addition to the 232 members who are elected by the state legislators, there are 12 members, being specialists in the fields of literature, science, arts and social services, who are directly nominated by the President.

The coming round of elections to the Rajya Sabha will put to the test, more than anything else, the present state of opposition unity, particularly among the four major non-left parties—BJP, Janata, Lok Dal and Congress(S).

However, the coming round of elections to the Rajya Sabha will put to the test, more than anything else, the present state of opposition unity, particularly the unity among the four major non-left national parties, the BJP, the Janata Party, the Lok Dal and the Congress(S). Competing with each other, their likely hauls will be as follows: Janata Party—two seats in Karnataka; BJP—one seat in Madhya Pradesh; and Lok Dal—one seat in Uttar Pradesh. But, if the four parties can pool their strength, they can hope to win one seat each in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Haryana. They can also get two seats in Bihar in addition to one the Lok Dal-BJP combination will win anyway; one extra seat in Uttar Pradesh other than the one that is the Lok Dal's due; and one extra seat in Karnataka over and above the two that are the Janata Party's share. Altogether, unity of the four parties will earn them the respectable haul of eight additional seats in a desperate struggle where even retaining a toehold matters greatly.

Last fortnight, the Janata Party President Chandra Shekhar met BJP President Atal Behari Vajpayee to arrive at a package deal on three states where the two parties stand most to gain by united action: Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Haryana. Of nine seats in the three states, a united approach can yield three extra wins for the two parties. "We have to minimise differences on the issue of Rajya Sabha elections," admitted Chandra Shekhar. But there were strong factors operating within both the parties that kept them apart.

In Gujarat, for instance, the BJP and the Janata Party, with 23 and 16 MLA's, together with the six MLA's from the Rashtriya Congress, can hope to win one of the four seats to be filled this time. The Gujarat Janata Party President, Indubhai Patel, claims the seat for his party. However, Makrand Desai, the president of the Gujarat unit of BJP, has taken the plea that on two earlier occasions, in 1980 as well as 1982, the Janata Party staked its claim to the seat but lost out because it could not mobilise its own MLA's to vote for the party candidate. In 1982, Indubhai Patel himself was the candidate, but many MLA's of the Janata Party refrained from voting.

Similarly, an interesting contest lies ahead in Karnataka where the ruling Janata, with 96 members in the 225-member Assembly, could easily win two of the four vacant seats—the number of MLA's first preference votes required for being eligible to election being 46. However, the Congress(I) and its ally, the Karnataka Kranti Ranga with 87 MLA's can hope to win one of the two remaining seats. For the last seat, the Congress(I) bloc will still require five first preference votes. But the Janata, with the help of 18 BJP MLA's, six MLA's belonging to CPI and the CPI(M) and the 15 Independent MLA's, can still manage to upset the Congress(I)'s applecart.

In Maharashtra, for instance, the Congress(I) stands clearly to win six of the seven seats falling vacant. The BJP and the Janata Party, with 14 MLA's each, and the Congress(S), with a strength of nine, are not capable of winning the seventh seat individually. But, if they pool in, they can muster a strength of 37, which will enable them to win one seat. The BJP may well fall in line and support a



Shahabuddin, Vijaye Raje Scindia and A.G. Kulkarni: exit of opposition heavy weights

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Janata candidate for the seventh seat in Maharashtra, but it will surely bargain for similar magnanimity from the Janata in other states, notably in Rajasthan.

The BJP has 32 MLA's in the 200-member Rajasthan Assembly (as against the Congress(I) strength of 148), but the Lok Dal-Janata-BJP-Congress(S) combination can mobilise as many as 48 first preference votes in the Assembly—a feat which can clearly ensure the victory of an opposition candidate among the three vacancies that are to be filled. In Haryana, a Lok Dal-BJP-Janata combination can wrest one of two seats.

For the Congress(I), the Rajya Sabha elections will provide an occasion to demonstrate unity and cohesion. In 1982, two of its candidates, one in Andhra Pradesh and another in Maharashtra, were defeated as party MLA's defied a whip and voted against their party candidates. In Uttar Pradesh, as many as 16 party MLA's defiantly got their votes deliberately invalidated in protest against the erstwhile chief minister, V.P. Singh.





(From left) Zakaria, Salve and Pant: departure

"There will be no cross-voting this time," announced G.K. Moopanar, general secretary of the All India Congress Committee(I) (AICC-I), basing his confidence on hope rather than foreknowledge. But, in the two states of Bihar and Maharashtra, the threat of MLA's defying the party's mandate loomed large. With the combined Opposition in a position to win two of the seven vacancies in Bihar, cross-voting by even 30 of 192 Congress(I) MLA's could lead to a third seat slipping away from the ruling party.

Similarly, in Maharashtra, a 20-vote dissent could lead to the unexpected loss of a seat for the Congress(I). In Uttar Pradesh, only 25 Congress(I) dissenters out of 323 MLA's could cause the windfall gain of one extra seat for the Opposition.

Even at its worst, however, the Congress(I) can hope to notch up 21 additional seats, falling only 10 short of the magical figure of 164 that gives it the two-thirds majority. The party had almost the same tally in the height of the Emergency in 1976 when a series of constitutional amendments—including one extending the Lok Sabha's term from five to six years—was pushed through. The crucial question is: will history come full circle after March 29?

—SUMIT MITRA

WEST BENGAL

Seating Scrap

THE COMING Rajya Sabha elections are proving a severe test for all West Bengal's political parties. Though the CPI(M) is sure of three out of five of the seats that are up for election it is squabbling with its Left Front partners over which party should contest the fourth seat. In the opposition Congress(I) also a struggle is on about who should be nominated to stand for the sole seat that it is sure to capture by virtue of its strength of 59 in the Assembly.

Ever since the Left Front came to power nearly seven years ago, every election has led to bitter wrangling between the Marxists and the two other important constituents of the Front—the Forward Bloc and the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP). The smaller partners of the Front had to stand by and watch as they knew that they never had any chance as the three biggest parties fought for the state amongst themselves.

This time, however, there was a surprise in store for everyone. As both the RSP and the Forward Bloc put up their claims as usual, Left Front Chairman Saroj Mukherjee announced that the seat would go to the Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI) one of the smaller members of the Front. Mukherjee also mentioned RCPI leader Sudhin Kumar as the candidate for the fourth seat. Kumat was West Bengal food minister in the first Left Front ministry but had lost his seat in the 1982 elections.




Subrata Mukherjee (left) and Saroj Mukherjee: bitter wranglings

Saroj Mukherjee's contention that he was only trying to help the smaller constituents did not go down well with either the RSP or the Forward Bloc. Both pointed out that the CPI(M) was being generous at their expense instead of giving up one of the three seats which it won last time. Relations between the Forward Bloc and the CPI(M) were spoilt further when the Forward Bloc did not hesitate to publicly criticise the CPI(M) at its state conference in Calcutta.

On the other side of the fence the Rajya Sabha elections have started the usual scramble between the contending factions in the Congress(I) for the one seat due to the party. Matters have been further complicated by the fact that two prominent members Subrata Mukherjee and Somen Mitra have sponsored the name of Calcutta High Court judge P.C. Barooah. Due to retire this September, he has over the past few years won the acclaim of many Congressmen for his series of injunctions against government orders and open condemnation of the ministry in his court.

Last fortnight Barooah was in Delhi for a long spell and there were strong rumours that he was also being backed by Railway Minister A.B.A. Ghani Khan Choudhury. Said Subrata Mukherjee: "I feel that non-political sympathisers of our party like Justice Barooah should be sent to the Rajya Sabha."

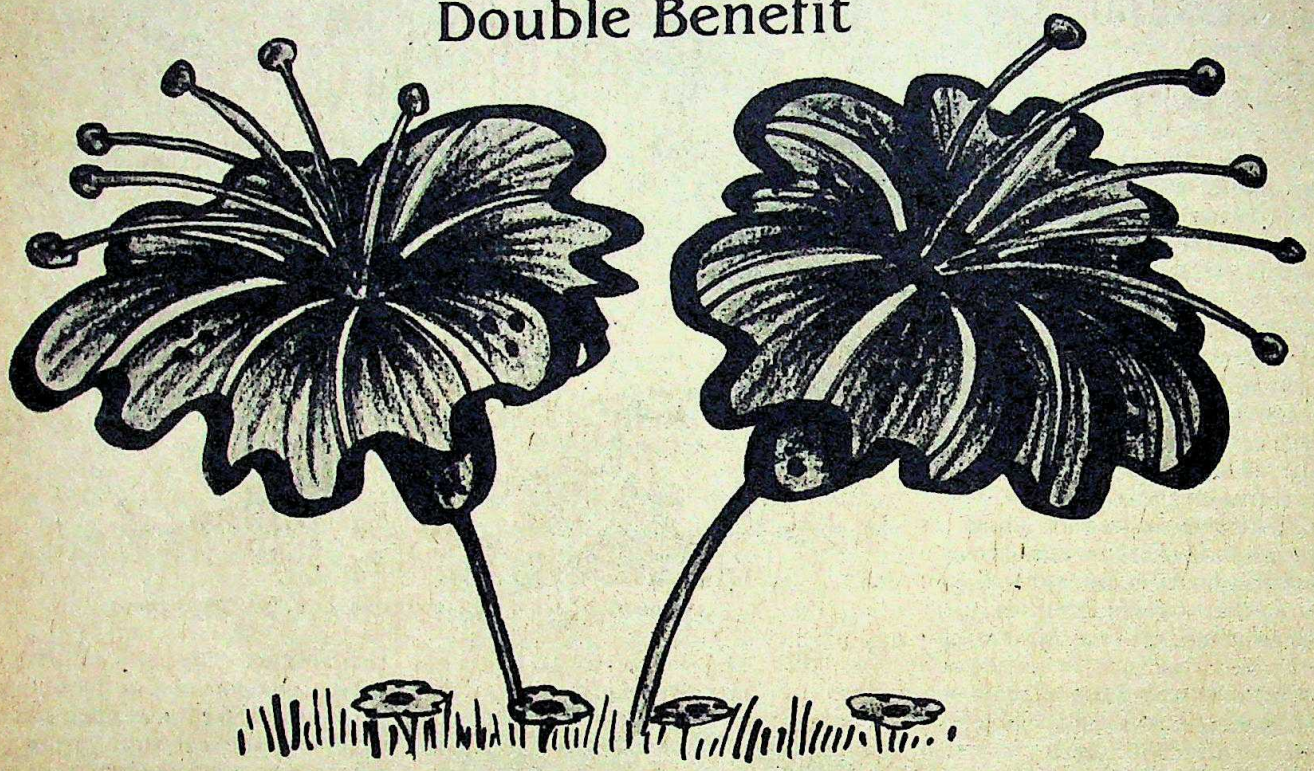
But in the faction-ridden party no candidate was likely to get the nomination without a fight. Others jockeying for the seat were more recent entrants to the Congress(I) like former Union commerce minister Debi Prasad Chattopadhyaya, currently chairman of the Education Commission, and Priya Ranjan Das Munshi who has been desperately trying to find a foothold in the fold ever since his return to the party late last year from the Congress(S). However, the old guard in the Congress(I) are dead against letting the new entrants get the upper hand and have told the high command they are opposed to both. And while each party knows how many seats it will get in the Rajya Sabha the elections still bring out the worst in them.

—SUMANTA SEN

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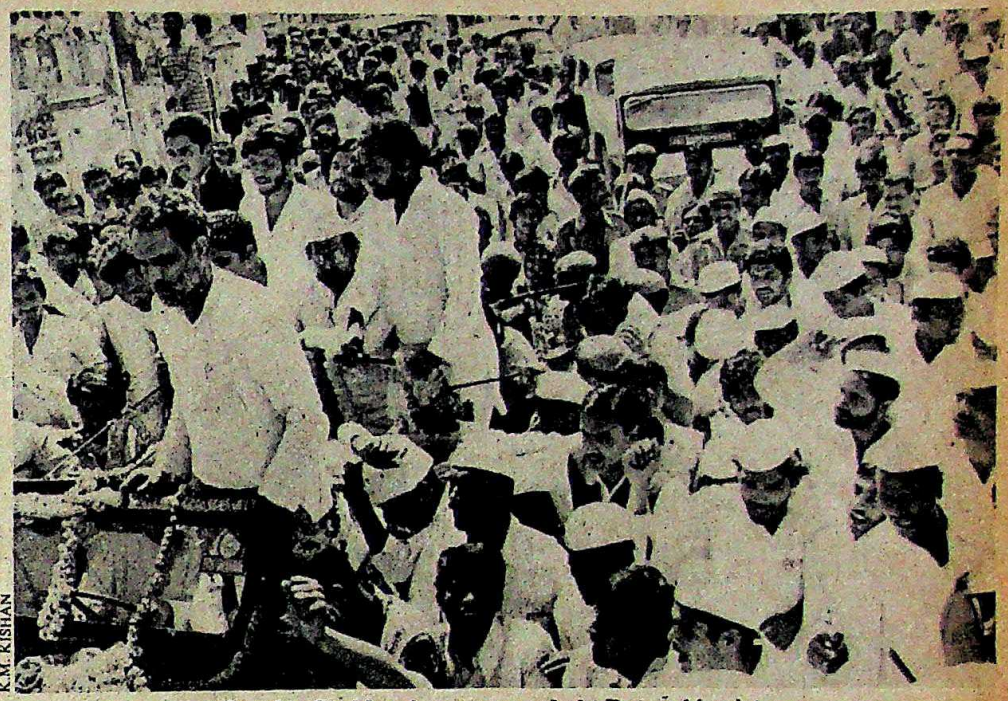
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JANATA PARTY

Personality Politics



K.M. KISHAN

Chandra Shekhar in a motorcade in Patna: big victory

IF CLICHES could win elections, no one would lose them in India. If the Congress(I)'s favourite obsession is the threat, real or imaginary, to the country's security and stability, the Opposition never tires of harping on the need for a "credible national alternative". It was in the same quest that the Janata Party found itself in the headlines last fortnight, though not always in the most complimentary terms.

As the initial round of the build-up for the forthcoming general elections peaked the party had at the end of a series of significant developments decided to reveal its hand. Though no official announcement to this effect was made, it was obvious that Chandra Shekhar was to be its offering to the electorate as an alternative to Mrs Gandhi. The party's plenary session at Jayaprakash Nagar near Patna turned out to be an out-and-out Chandra Shekhar affair, projecting him personally and politically. It also armed him with omnibus powers to take major decisions on distribution of powers within the party and, more important, to initiate steps to bring about unity among the non-left opposition parties to prevent division in the non-Congress(I) vote.

Immediately, Shekhar and his lieutenants began exploring the possibility of merger with "likeminded" groups, a fact made evident by his keeping vacancies in the national executive of the party ostensibly to accommodate representatives of the prospective new entrants. In the process, the old guard of the party, led by Morarji Desai, was consigned to the sidelines.

But Shekhar's passage was far from smooth and, if at the end of the exercise his party came out bruised he had to blame for it his own obstinacy besides infighting which is now as old as his party. He faltered on his new launching pad, his re-election to the president's post. Overreacting to the challenge of Subramaniam Swamy who has always packed more bluster in his voice than support at his back, he launched himself on the eve of the election into a campaign to nominate members to the party National Council, a step that diluted the impact of his 779-vote victory against Swamy who said, charging him with having rigged the election: "He chose his own voters." Swamy supporters pointed out that Shekhar had nominated his well-known supporters like Swami Agnivesh, Sushama Swaraj and Balwant Rai Tayal of Haryana to the National Council from Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa respectively. Similarly, Manager Singh, his country-cousin from Ballia was nominated from Bihar and Mohan Dharia of Gujarat from Uttar Pradesh.

Besides, they charge Shekhar with having packed the whole council with his nominees. Retorted Shekhar: "The allegation is correct as far as Uttar Pradesh is concerned. The party president always nominates people in states so as to give representation to all sections of society, including women and backward classes. Yet only 85 among the 140 from Uttar Pradesh were nominated. And even before the election I had said that if the margin of my victory is 85 or less, I will resign. Look at the margin now."

Shekhar, in fact, blamed the press for having blown up the whole affair, saying: "In normal times, the press thinks the Janata Party is insignificant. But the moment we have problems it begins to talk in terms of a split in the Janata." Asserting that the controversy over the election had not weakened the party he said: "In fact the rank and file of the party finds itself more consolidated now and we have the satisfaction of having held party elections unlike most others."

But even his supporters agree that he overestimated Swamy's challenge. Said one of his loyalists: "Even if he had not gone into a nomination spree his victory margin would have remained more or less the same. Swamy is such a non-entity." Shekhar paid for the mistake in terms of embarrassment at Patna as the party while generally cold-shouldering Swamy, formed a committee to go into his allegation of rigging.

But this row was not the only problem Shekhar faced. The party, which continues to be an amalgam of disparate groups seven years after its birth was again increasingly faced with internal strife, particularly in Bihar where it hopes to make substantial gains in the elections. Karpoori Thakur, former chief minister and maverick backward classes leader has not accepted his new status as a virtual nobody in the state unity and stayed away on what many observers thought was a false pretext of indisposition.

Significantly, Thakur's supporters, led by legislator Udai Narayan Rai abstained from election. Complained Rai: "Karpoori Thakur has been ignored while lesser leaders like Devi Lal (Haryana), Chimanbhai Patel (Gujarat) and Biju Patnaik (Orissa) have been made presidents of their respective state units."

Yet, on the credit side, the party had escaped the spectre of a split with Morarji Desai failing to carry out his threat to resign in case Shekhar was elected for a third term. He made his unhappiness clear by his absence from the session—on the excuse of a wedding in a friend's family—but only succeeded in alienating the younger element in the party further. The loss of the old guard would not exactly displease Shekhar and his supporters.

Bickerings apart, the long march that began with his padayatra exactly a year ago, had brought Shekhar to Jayaprakash Nagar as his party's de facto leader at the next poll. But the race that begins from here promises to be more of a political steeplechase, where it will take more than populism and hype to break ahead of the cluster of also rans.

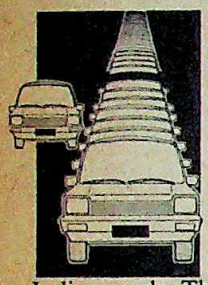
—SHEKHAR GUPTA and FARZAND AHMED

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MARUTI

Jumping the Queue



THERE IS a new bumper sticker that has invaded the Indian automobile market. It reads: "This is not a Maruti" and is pasted prominently on the backs of a number of Suzuki compacts imported before Maruti introduced its look-alike model on Indian roads. The stickers are indicative of the fact that Marutis have become the biggest little status symbols in the country.

Not surprisingly, there are any number of customers eager to pull every trick in the book to beat the three-year-long queue. For those who can afford it, the simplest way is to shell out the over 100 per cent premium currently being asked by those whose allotments have come through. But for those who cannot, the only way is to use the oldest and most frequently used trick in the book—political clout. MP's raised the issue in Parliament last fortnight and made an impassioned if rather unjustifiable plea for a special quota for themselves. But there were quite a few who remained noticeably removed from the collective appeal by the MP's and for good reason; they have already managed to wriggle themselves into the 5 per cent discretionary quota allowed Maruti Udyog Limited (MUL).

And they are not the only ones. The list of the favoured few includes 40 MP's, ministers, wives of important government officials, dancers, journalists, bureaucrats and members of the judiciary.

On the surface, the allotments are unchallengeable. Maruti, like all automobile manufacturers, reserves for itself a 5 per cent quota that it distributes at its discretion. The sole criterion is that it is used to promote sales. But with a car as popular and comparatively low-priced as the Maruti, the question of sales promotion becomes irrelevant. Which is why the list of people given allotments from the discretionary quota is questionable, to say the least. Out of the 400 requests received by the MUL board, the 40 who have been obliged cover a wide spectrum and seem to have been carefully selected for their affinity to power centres or their usefulness to the Government. Hence, the list includes the names of top judicial luminaries like Chief Justice Y.V. Chandrachud, and four other judges; MP's V.C. Shukla and Satish Aggarwal, senior bureaucrats like Finance Secretary P.K. Kaul, External Affairs Secretary Romesh Bhandari, former RAW chief Shankaran Nair, Director, CBI J.S. Bawa, IG Punjab Police, P.S. Bhindar and Delhi Area Commander Major-General O.S. Bhandari.

Some celebrated the arrival of the new car with appropriate fanfare. For example, a judge not only specified the date and time of delivery but also performed puja and garlanded the car when it finally arrived. Yet another allottee celebrated by distributing Bengali sweets; but he wrote to the dealer saying he would take delivery later because he did not have money then. The Delhi Administration's Transport Directorate even allotted some of them special two-digit registration numbers.

Some special consideration seems to have been given to the wives of VIP's including Shuvra Mukherjee, wife of Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Charan Kaur, wife of former Union minister Swaran Singh and Bhanu Vaidya, wife of the army chief. The other women in the favoured list are both well-known dancers: Yamini Krishnamurthy and Rukmini Menon. MUL has also



Y.V. Chandrachud



A.P. Sharma



P.S. Bhindar



M. Hidayatullah



Y. Krishnamurthy



P.V. Narasimha Rao

The Chosen Few

Waiting List No.	
20,802	Chief Justice Y.V. Chandrachud
32,083	Justice Murtaza Fazal Ali
16,956	Justice Prafulchandra Natwar Lal Bhagwati
9,267	Justice R.S. Pathak
N.A	Justice B.N. Kripal of Delhi High Court*
35,162	Sunil Jakher, son of Balram Jakher, Lok Sabha speaker
18,505 (in Bombay)	M. Hidayatullah, vice-president
N.A	A.P. Sharma, governor, West Bengal*
36,090	Satish Aggarwal, BPJ Lok Sabha MP
N.A	Gulsher Ahmad, Lok Sabha MP*
21,405	Yogendra Sharma, CPI MP*
N.A	Anand Pathak, CPI(M) MP*
22,890	V.C. Shukla, Congress(I) MP
N.A	P.V. Narasimha Rao, Union minister for External Affairs*
457	Shuvra Mukherjee, wife of Pranab Mukherjee, Union finance minister
21,779	Bhanu Vaidya, wife of Chief of Army Staff General A.S. Vaidya
24-A-70 in Jalandhar	Charan Kaur, wife of Swaran Singh
21,699	Shankaran Nair, former RAW chief*
33,008	Romesh Bhandari, secretary, External Affairs Ministry
38,471	P.K. Kaul, finance secretary, Union Government
N.A	K.S. Rajan, former secretary, industrial development*
37,400	J.S. Bawa, director, CBI
35,771	P.S. Bhindar, IGP, Punjab
N.A	S.S. Gill, secretary, information & broadcasting*
N.A	Lieutenant Colonel M.J. Singh*
N.A	Major General O.S. Bhandari*
18,919	R. Rangarajan, chief of bureau, United News of India*
28,960	G.K. Reddy, bureau chief, *The Hindu*
In Bombay	Parle's for Sunil Gavaskar
In Bombay	Michael Ferreira, billiards champion
26,069	Ravi Chada
9,776	Rani Sawney
N.A	Rukmini Menon, noted dancer*
N.A	Yamini Krishnamurthy, dancer*
15,753	P. Shiv Shankar, Union energy minister
In Bombay	Dr Shanti Lal Mehta, noted surgeon
12,797	Vinay Kapoor

** yet to be delivered*

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taken care to oblige influential members of the fourth estate, namely R. Rangarajan, bureau chief of United News of India (UNI) and G.K. Reddy, bureau chief of *The Hindu*. Admits a senior Industry Ministry official: "Since MUL is in the business we have to keep the various pressure groups happy. We can't concede all the requests but we can ensure that each group is looked after."

According to guidelines adopted by MUL and given to Parliament, priority allotment can be made for: promotion of commercial interests of the company, promotion of the public interest; avoidance of undue individual hardships; and facilitation of MUL work by use of the vehicles by the company's employees.

Predictably MP's and judges got their allotment "in public interest". Others were favoured because they were either facing individual hardships or were in a position to promote the commercial interests of MUL. Admitted Satish Aggarwal. "Mine is a case of individual hardship. Ever since I resigned from the ministership in 1979, I am without a vehicle—other cars are quite expensive." Added CPI Rajya Sabha member Yogendra Sharma, another privileged allottee: "I have asked for a Maruti because I desperately need it for my personal use."

Union Industry Minister Narain Dutt Tiwari, replying to a question in Parliament last fortnight admitted that MUL had released eight cars till February 21, 1984 to various people out of the manufacturer's quota. However, he did not reveal to whom commitments were already made.

According to MUL's regulations, no individual officer is authorised to commit out-of-turn allotments. All applications received are placed for discussion before the monthly meeting of the board, dominated by MUL Chairman V. Krishnamurthy and Congress(I) heavyweight Arun Nehru.

Yet there is something eminently puzzling about two names on the list of 40—Ravi Chadha and Rani Sawney. Chadha is listed as a resident of Karol Bagh and under profession is merely referred to as a "social worker". Inquiries in Karol Bagh reveal that no such person has been heard of, which is incongruous considering the other names on the list. The same goes for Rani Sawney who is also listed as a social worker but of whom nobody seems to have heard. None of the MUL officials were willing to comment on the two or their whereabouts even though Chadha was granted the first of the three discretionary cars manufactured last December. However, one MUL source was willing to come up with the information that the two social workers are non-existent and are actually cover names for a "very prominent couple". Now who could they possibly be?

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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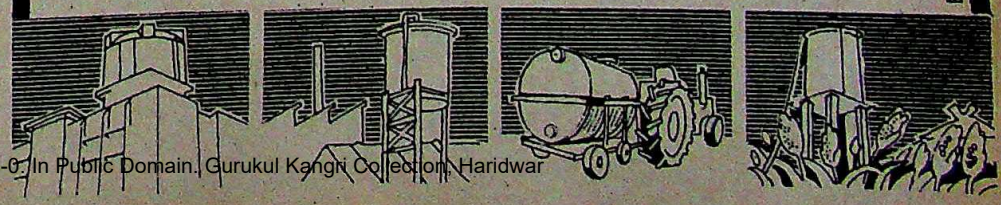
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VOTING MACHINES

The Ballot Battle

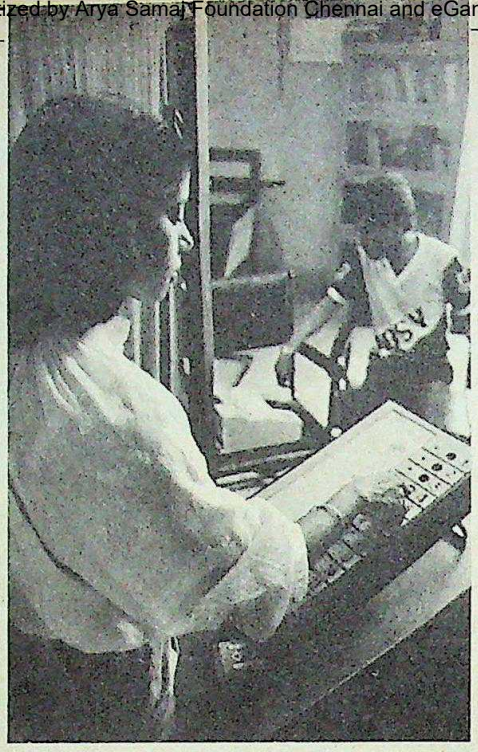
THE WORLD of law may be lacking in humour but it certainly has its ironies. Last fortnight a three-judge division bench of the Supreme Court was enacting another one just when the cognoscenti of the international legal community converged in Delhi for the World Appellate Judges Convention and debated the need to modernise the interpretation of outdated laws. In a significant interpretation of the country's electoral laws, the court struck down the Election Commission's (EC) recent introduction of electronic voting machines as an "arbitrary decision." In the bargain they put in reverse gear the modernisation of India's election machinery, a process that had already begun too late. It had also drawn the lines for a major legal battle.

The EC was in no mood to concede what R.K. Trivedi, chief election commissioner, called the "reduction of commission's status to a department of the Government of India". He added, with a hint of defiance: "I cannot comment on the judgement of the highest court in the country. But this interprets the constitutional position of the EC which should have been done by a constitutional bench. We are examining the prospect of a review petition."

It began with the writ petition filed unsuccessfully in the Kerala High Court by A.C. Jose of the Congress(I) who had lost the 1982 Assembly election to the Communist Party of India's Sivan Pillai. But last fortnight, as the Supreme Court bench upheld his appeal concluding that the EC had overstepped its authority in changing the voting procedure, hardly anyone realised its implications initially.

Much of these, however, were implicit in the strong language used by the judges who said: "If the commission is armed with such unlimited and arbitrary powers and if it ever happens that the person manning the commission shares or is wedded to a particular ideology he could, by giving odd directions, cause a political havoc or bring about a constitutional crisis, setting at naught the integrity and independence of the electoral process, so important and indispensable to the democratic system."

On the commission's argument that it could make liberal interpretation of the law when it did not provide for a certain contingency the court averred, even more damningly: "Indeed, if we were to accept the contention of the respondents it would convert the commission into an absolute despot..." The bench firmly stated that the commission's powers were confined to taking executive decisions and a major one like a change in the electoral process could have only been brought about through a legislative amendment in Parliament.



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Voting through an electronic machine: stalled modernisation

Constitutional issues apart, in practical terms the judgement opens a Pandora's box. To begin with, in each of the 11 other constituencies spread over Nagaland, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Bihar and Delhi where electronic voting has been held so far there may be a spate of election petitions. Besides, by the narrow logic of the judgement a host of routine decisions not provided for in the Peoples Representation Act could be questioned in courts now. For example:

- ► appointment of observers in key constituencies;
- ► arrangements on law and order—these include the deployment of police, paramilitary and armed forces;
- ► the usual ban on transfers of senior state government officers during the elections;
- ► orders banning candidates' camps near the polling booths and on plying of vehicles by them to carry voters;
- ► ban on liquor sales on polling days;
- ► procedure to mix state and Central government employees to aid impartial polling.

Officers in the EC argue that the introduction of electronic voting machines was a change as minor as these. "The election is only a process to impartially find out the wish of an elector with regard to a candidate", said Trivedi, arguing, "this can be done through a mark on a ballot paper or by pressing the button on the machine. We made a procedural change and not a substantial one." The court disagreed, going by Stroud's legal dictionary defining ballots as ballot papers put in a box and not the electronic registration on a machine.

Ashok Sen and Siddhartha Shankar Ray, the EC's counsel, however argued on the basis of the broader definition in the newer Black's dictionary. While the judgement evoked widespread reaction in the media, the most critical response was from the *Indian Express* which said in an editorial: "It is that dictionary that needs amendment rather than the law...mechanical judgements are as open to criticism as mechanical voting machines."

The court, however, has said nothing against the principle of electronic voting which, given the increasing number of voters in the country, is an inevitability. The use of machines saves over Rs 3 lakh per Lok Sabha constituency. On an average, three metric tonnes of paper is consumed (at Rs 12,000 per tonne) for one constituency and it takes Rs 10,000 to merely cut it. Printing takes about Rs 1 lakh.

Besides making voting much simpler the machines drastically reduce manpower requirements and completely eliminate the drudgery of counting ballot papers. Said Trivedi: "This had the sanction of all political parties. When we used these in two constituencies in Bihar, political leaders came to me to compliment us for holding a fair poll even in Bihar. Electronic voting reduces the chances of rigging." For the moment, however, the commission had asked its suppliers Bharat Electronics Limited and Electronics Corporation of India to go slow on the manufacture of the machines, each of which costs about Rs 5,000.

But the fate of electronic machines is really not the heart of the matter. From the EC's point of view the blow was that the Government adopted a neutral attitude in the case. Even the attorney-general did not respond to a notice by the court for his opinion. As a despondent Trivedi rued: "The commission has been left high and dry. What is the commission except a chief election commissioner and two secretaries? Everyone should, instead, be trying to strengthen the commission to discharge the increasing political, social and administrative needs of the expanding electoral system".

The touch of desperation is understandable. For, even as Trivedi and his men set about examining the legal alternatives, they had more urgent contingencies on hand. Like hurriedly drawing up new plans for Mizoram where assembly elections scheduled for April 25 were planned by the commission to be an electronic affair.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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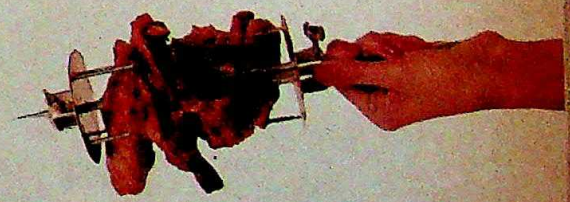
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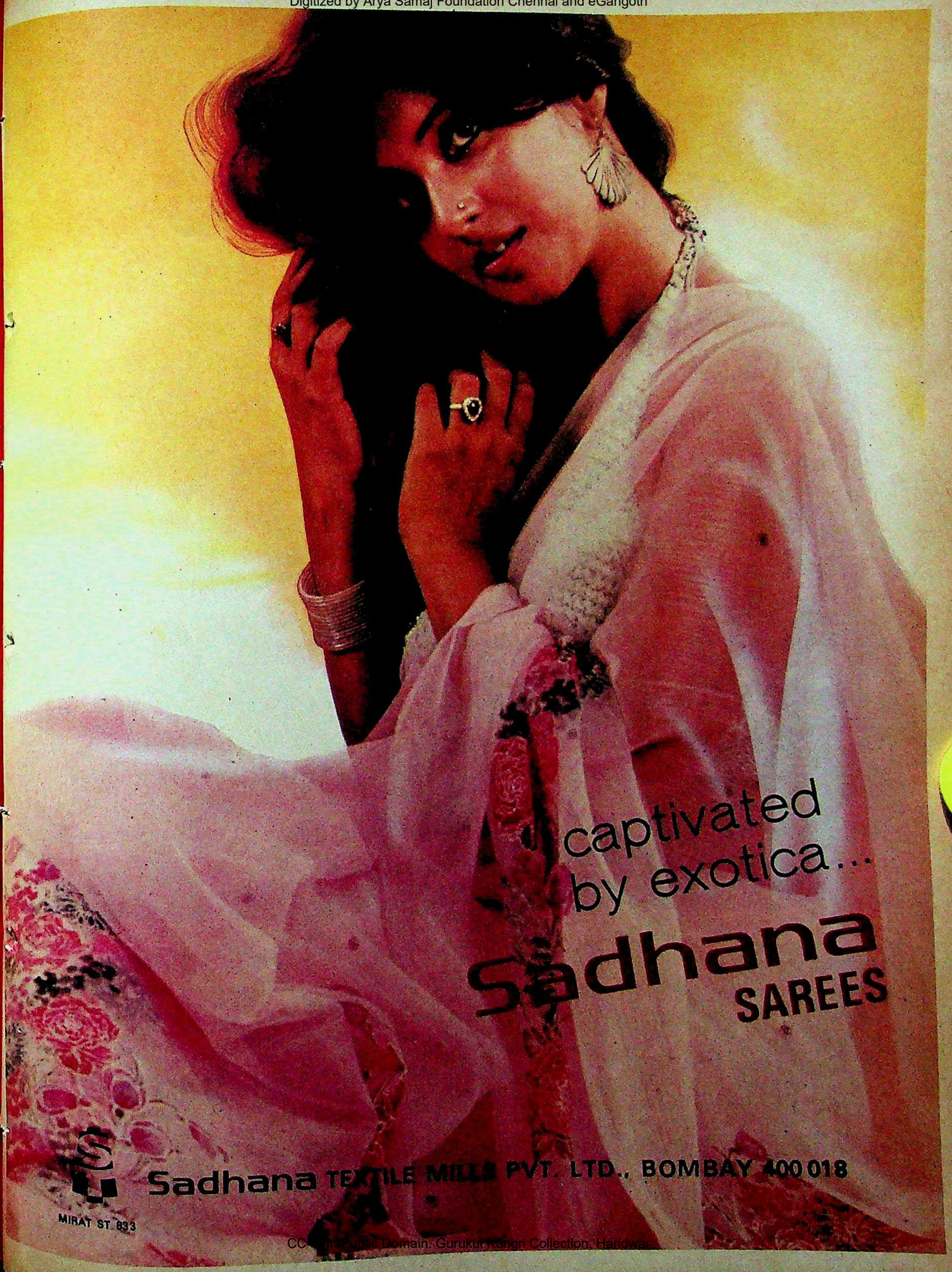
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MADHYA PRADESH

Governor's Gaffe



DID HE or didn't he? Right through the first week of March, the Madhya Pradesh Assembly was witness to bitter—and often comic—scenes as legislators tried to figure out an answer to whether or not Governor Bhagwat Dayal Sharma had made remarks against the Government's reservation policy which were also offensive to Adivasis and Harijans. The opposition has been admantly pressing for his resignation on this issue.

The controversy had its roots in the annual function of the Doctors Club in Bhopal on December 18, 1983 to which the 66-year-old Sharma was invited. The club, with about 30 members, is described as an organisation for social and cultural activities.

The debated remarks apparently came following a doctor's suggestion that there ought to be reservation of seats in medical colleges for doctors' children. Sharma reportedly said that one mistake had already been made at the outset and it was being continued because no one wanted to annoy this section of voters. The reference was, quite obviously, to the reservation policy on Adivasis and Harijans. Later, in a lighter vein, the Governor also referred to the calibre of doctors emerging following the reservation policy.

From this grew a violent political debate. Initially, though, no one took notice of Sharma's statement. The first reaction came only on January 3 when 31-year-old Rama Shankar Singh, state unit president of the Lok Dal and the party's lone MLA, wrote to President Zail Singh complaining against Sharma's remarks and demanding that he be removed. Argued Singh: "When a governor takes an oath, he swears to 'preserve, protect and defend the Constitution'. And yet, the Governor has publicly spoken against reservation, which is provided for in the Constitution. It is inexcusable and the Governor should quit. It shows his frame of mind as regards Adivasis and Harijans."

Adds former chief minister and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Virendra Kumar Sakhlecha: "I don't think it was a slip of the tongue on the Governor's part. Many people do feed that the reservation policy ought to be discontinued—and they are entitled to express their opinion. But it is unfortunate that of all people the Governor, who swears by the Constitution, should have said something like this."

On January 31, the executive of the BJP legislature party passed a resolution condemning the Governor's remarks and on February 29, a day before the start of the budget session, the party dispatched a letter to Sharma seeking a final clarification before the assembly session commenced. Said senior party leader Shitla Sahay: "Normally, the Raj Bhavan responds promptly. But this time we got no reply at all." There were predictably uproarious scenes the following day during the Governor's address to the House culminating in a walkout by the opposition. At the end of a constantly interrupted 35-minute speech, Sharma tersely refuted the allegation with "I did not say so".

It appeared then that the issue would gradually die down, but the *Indian Express* of March 5 carried a news item which caught the eye of opposition leaders in the Lok Sabha. In it, the newspaper's Bhopal correspondent N.K. Singh claimed to have a tape of the speech in which Sharma had made the controversial remarks.



RAKESH JAIMINI

Sharma at the controversial Doctors Club meeting

The issue was raised in the Lok Sabha during zero hour by Janata Party members Ram Bilas Paswan and Subramaniam Swamy, who were immediately backed by other opposition leaders demanding Sharma's dismissal. Speaker Balram Jakhar agreed that it was a serious matter but that verification was necessary. At this point, Union Home Minister P.C. Sethi said that he would check out the facts and present them to the speaker.

The Governor was now national news. In Bhopal, the opposition appeared to be filled with new vigour and there were several heated debates. On March 6 Rama Shankar Singh was ejected from the house—along with the bench to which he clung. And the following day, Singh and CPI legislator Kapoor Chand Ghuwara were suspended for five days until the debate on the motion of thanks for the Governor's address was over.

An element of mystery was thrown in when it became known that a video film had been made of the function which could apparently provide proof of the Governor's faux pas. It was alleged that pressure was being brought on the doctors to hand over the film. But said the club's president, Dr Vijay Pagare: "No pressure whatsoever has been exerted on any of us. The film is our club's property and five of us, founder members, have decided that we will not hand over the film to anyone unless the five of us agree to it."

But more mystery ensued. Pagare said this at 12.40 p.m. on March 7, convinced that he was in possession of the only copy even as Singh and Ghuwara were pressing Speaker Ram Kishore Shukla to accept the film as evidence against Sharma. Failing in their attempts, they finally held a show of a badly copied film especially for the state capital's newsmen. The film confirmed Sharma had spoken against reservation. On the same day the matter cropped up in the Lok Sabha with CPI MP Indrajit Gupta too flourishing a video cassette said to contain the Governor's remarks.

Sharma, whose five year term expired in September 1982—he was appointed Orissa's Governor on September 23, 1977 and took charge in Madhya Pradesh in April 1980—is possibly wondering what he has got himself into. His silence, instead of killing the controversy, has fanned it. Fond of playing chess, he is probably wondering what his next move will be.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

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Sethi's Bill 746/83 A

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ANDHRA PRADESH

Bureaucratic Backlash

WHEN Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao described himself as Yama at his first conference with district collectors in February last year, he caused some surprise and mirth among the bureaucrats. But over the past year, the surprise has turned to dismay and the mirth to anger. Bureaucrats have been continuously shuffled up and down the corridors of power. And with the exit of Chief Secretary G.V. Ramakrishna last fortnight, Rama Rao's regime has gained the dubious distinction of changing two chief secretaries in less than 14 months.

Rama Rao has gradually alienated the 600,000 government employees in the state through inept handling and overzealous measures. During the non-gazetted officers (NGO's) strike last year, he had thundered that he would "skin alive" corrupt employees. He had warned the bureaucrats that he had dossiers on their performance and would not tolerate any sabotage of his Government's policies and programmes.

As the head of the state's 600,000 government employees, the chief secratary repeatedly clashed with Rama Rao on various issues. The chief minister had initially dismissed these differences as "an Arabian Nights tale" and Ramakrishna, in the time-honoured tradition of self-effacing civil servants, maintained a stoic silence.

But finally, last fortnight he said: "It is neither personal pique nor anger but principles that prompted me to leave. I feel it is not useful to work any longer in a place when the element of mistrust and misunderstanding creeps in. Even the authority of the office was blurred at times. Any shift in the line of command erodes morale and creates disorder and I was against such a situation growing any further."

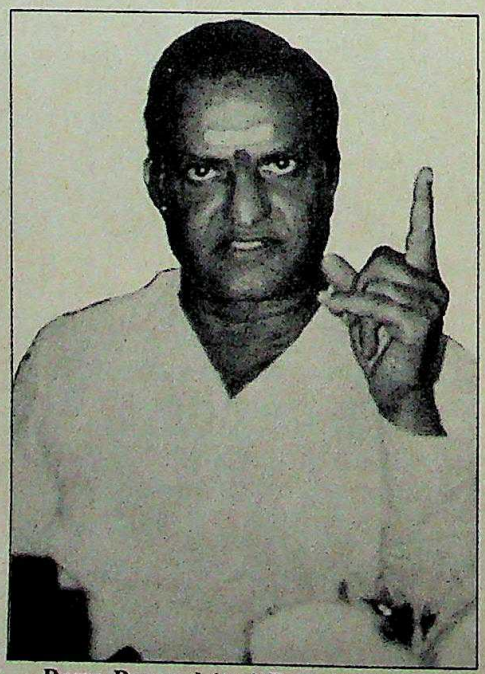
When the suave, soft-spoken bureaucrat took over last July—after his predecessor, B.N. Raman, was sent packing following differences with Rama Rao on how to handle the NGO's strike—his first task was to bring the striking employees back to their desks. Next, he attempted to weld a working unity among the various groups in the bureaucracy. All this while he had to contend with a chief minister in a hurry to see his policies in practice but without any understanding of the delicate nuances required to coax a belligerent administration to help him achieve that.

A classic example of the chief minister's ham-handed manner was the decision to abolish village officers like karnams and munsifs. The chief minister agreed with the view that the 37,000 officials could be replaced by 4,500 village assistants, though an official note specified that 10,000 persons were required. When the Supreme Court stayed the abolition of the posts, Rama Rao took the view that recalcitrant bureaucrats were responsible and this led to some bad blood between him and his aides.

Probably the largest bone of contention, however, was the role of the dharma maha matra (DMM), Rama Rao's ombudsman. The bureaucrats label his investigations into charges against them as "tyrannous". When Ramakrishna came from New Delhi to take over the administration he was greeted with a barrage of complaints from his colleagues about the DMM, E.V. Ram Reddi. According to the bureaucrats, Reddi functioned without any check and flouted established administrative practices in calling for files and information.

In response to the allegations of "witch-hunting", Ramakrishna stonewalled the DMM's efforts. He also suggested to the chief minister that the role of the DMM be clearly defined. But apparently Rama Rao was evasive about dealing with this even after the appointment of the lok ayukta.





Rama Rao and (top) Ramakrishna: a hamstrung administration

The proverbial last straw came in the form of Rama Rao's unlawful fiat to the Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) to withdraw its order imposing an eight-day wage cut for each day the miners struck work illegally. The chief minister's purpose was to avoid a strike and ensure a steady supply of coal at a time of electricity shortage in the state.

Ramakrishna, who has served as secretary in the Union Ministry of Energy, was wary of forcing the state Government's will on an autonomous company in which the Centre also owns shares. He asked for a meeting with SCCL Chairman K.M. Ahmed, but before a solution could be found, the miners struck work. Angry that the administration had not acted in time, Rama Rao publicly arraigned Ramakrishna and Ahmed.

Now Rama Rao has a tricky job: to appoint a new chief secretary. He must find a Telugu-speaking non-Brahmin, with more than a year to retire. This combination is not easy to find. As one senior secretary said: "If NTR wants to find one satisfying all the conditions, the cruel irony is that he will have to look down the list and pick N.K. Muralidhar Rao, who had been suspended by him on allegations of corruption."

At present, the Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, Sharvan Kumar, is doing double duty, with additional charge of the coveted chief secretaryship. Only recently, Kumar was promoted to chief secretary's rank to bring him on par with those of his batch of IAS officers in New Delhi and other state capitals.

As it is abnormal to have an officer of chief secretary rank as principal secretary to a chief minister, the promotion has caused some unsavoury talk among some of the other officers. They allege that he managed the promotion through his closeness to Rama Rao and as a prelude to replacing Ramakrishna. However, being a non-Telugu will probably mar Kumar's chances of being confirmed in the post.

The seniormost Telugu person on the state civil list with more than a year to retirement is B.P.R. Vithal, budget adviser to the Government of Sudan. His assignment in Khartoum ends on April 11, but he may continue there till May 31, the end of the Sudanese financial year. However, as he is a Brahmin, Vithal stands only a slim chance.

A more interesting question than who Rama Rao will appoint, though, is how long he will be able to work with him. He has already earned himself the reputation, as one bureaucrat put it, for "throwing out chief secretaries like worn-out coats".

—AMARNATH K. MENON

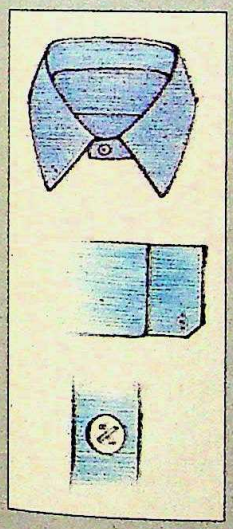
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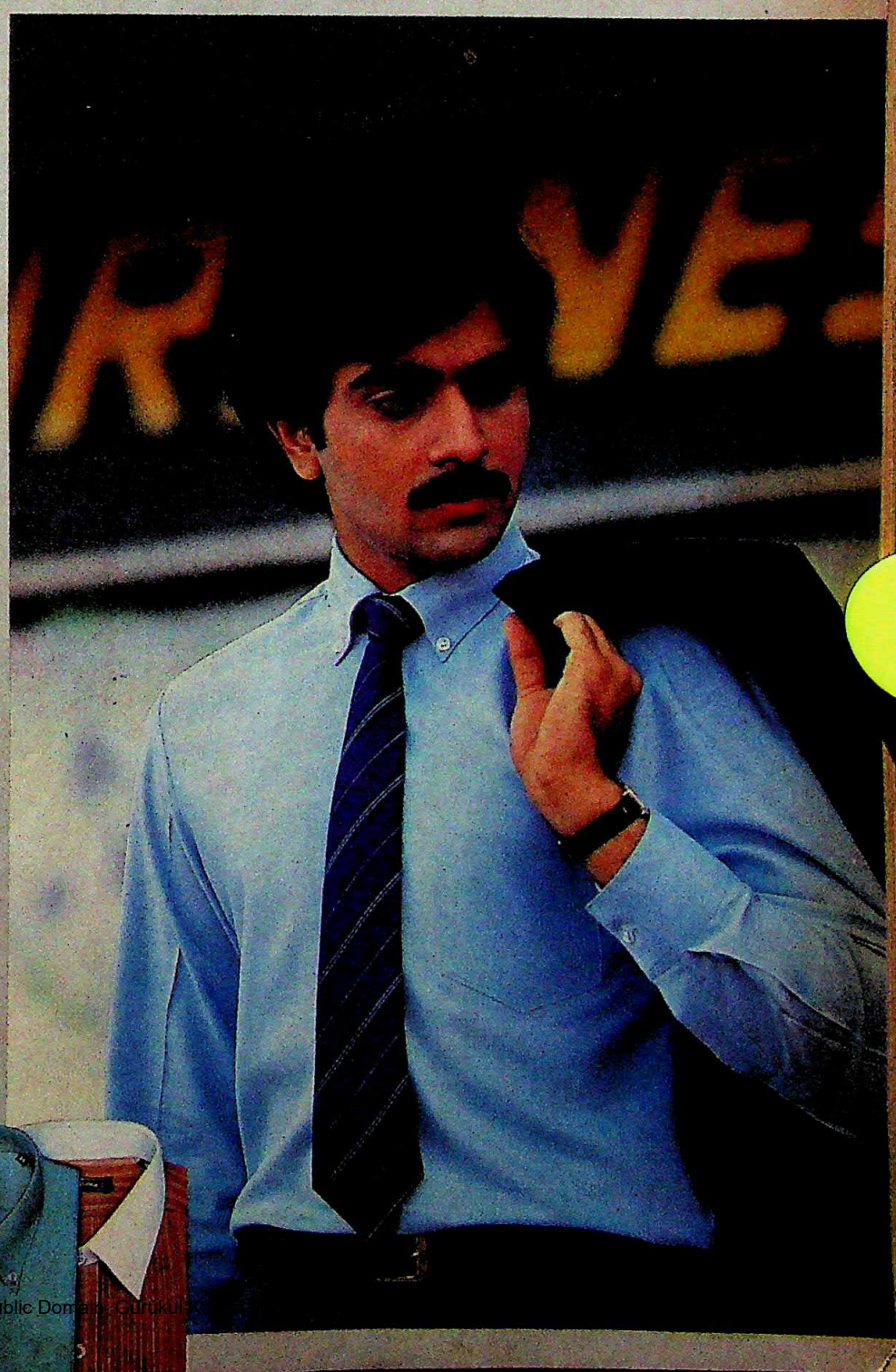
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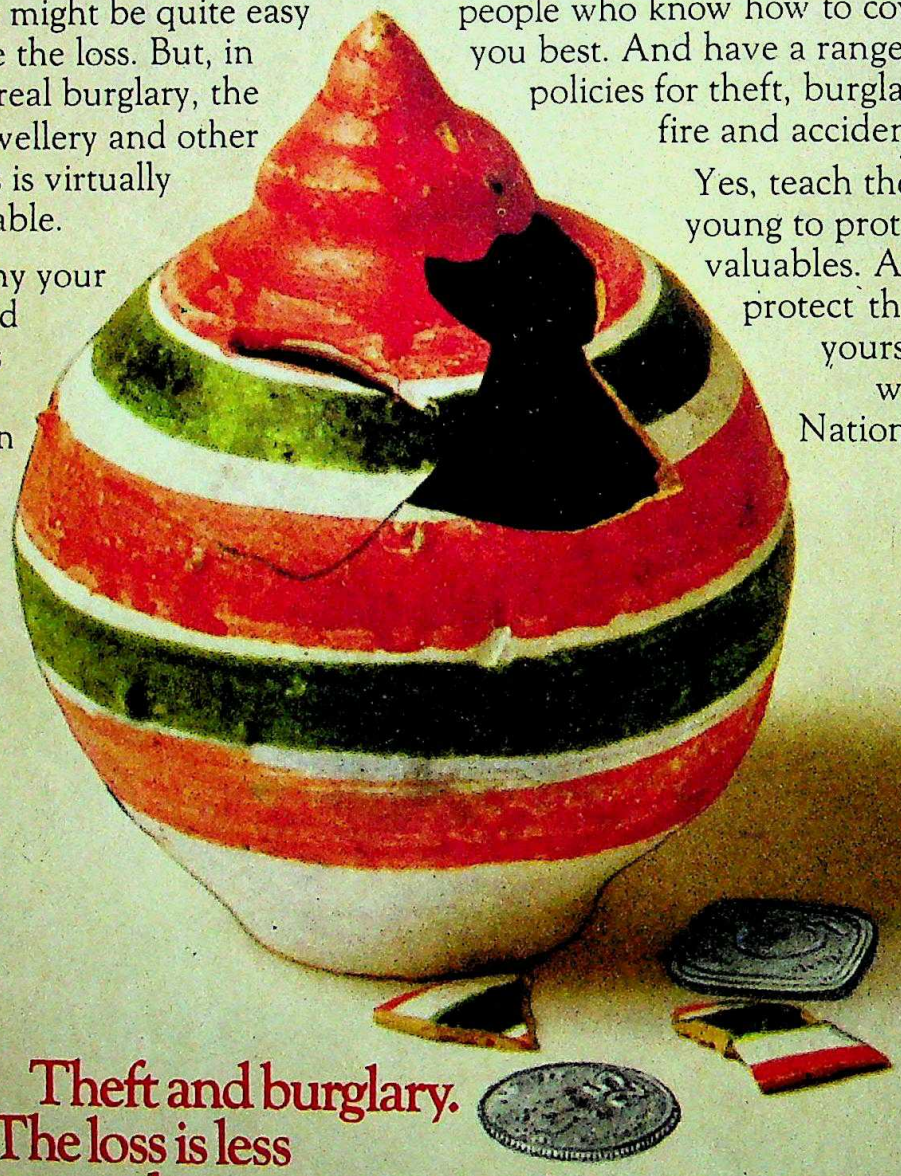
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KERALA

A Costly Explosion

THE EXPLOSION was loud enough to get nearly everyone in Cochin out of bed. But the thunderous blast at 5.30 a.m. on March 8, as an aviation tank blew up in the Cochin Refineries at Ambalamugal was only the beginning of one of the worst fires in the history of the Indian oil industry. For two days it raged unchecked, defying the efforts of fire-fighters from all over the state to put it out.

The toll at the end was four dead and crores worth of property destroyed. But it could well have been worse. The fire began in the aviation tank and spread quickly to two naphtha tanks. But according to a senior police officer if the LPG unit near the burning tanks had caught fire, the entire area around the refinery would have been devastated. Fortunately the flames shot straight up nearly 100 metres into the sky. The thick black smoke was visible from high-rise buildings in Cochin 15 km away.

As it is the houses in the area suffered lakhs worth of damage. One of the worst hit buildings was the Mar Gregarios Chapel across the road from the refineries. All the 13 doors of the chapel were blown in and a part of the roofing fell off. Its chief priest Mani Mathai who was praying at the altar has been hospitalised with severe head injuries. Says K.M. Kuriakose, a church committee member: "I have never seen anything like this." The people living nearby were initially asked to leave their houses and go to safer areas. Later in the night the police changed their minds and appealed to them to return to prevent the danger of looting.

By a strange stroke of irony one of the first casualties of the fire was the Cochin Refineries fire station which was gutted. But the entire complex still looks like a war ravaged zone littered with broken glass and wood. Officials are in the dark about the causes of the fire. State Home Minister Vayalar Ravi who was once the president of the refinery trade union rules out sabotage. Indian Oil officials, however, are only beginning their investigations. A team of industry experts led by K.K. Malhotra, general manager, Indian Oil Corporation, has arrived in Cochin to do an on-the-spot assessment. The total loss is tentatively estimated to be around Rs 8 crore. The fuel in the three burnt tanks alone is estimated to be worth Rs 1.5 crore. And the burnt tanks themselves have been insured for Rs 5.57 crore by three leading insurance companies.



Smoke billowing out of the Cochin Refineries: devastating loss

Worse still the refinery may lose a lot of money as it will have to close for at least six months. G.K. Abraham, the executive director of the refinery, however, optimistically says that immediate steps are being taken to see that there is no shortage of petroleum products. The priority will be to ensure that tank and wagon loading facilities for petroleum products are restored. As the refinery was already planning a two-month shutdown, petroleum stocks had already been built up. But it appears that the state is almost certain to face a shortage of cooking gas. Petrol bunk owners are doing brisk business as people fill up their tanks fearing a shortage.

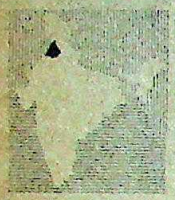
The fire has come as something of an eye-opener for many people. C. Subramaniam, inspector general of fire services, admits that the fire-fighting forces have never faced such a blaze. And all through, they faced the awesomely frightening possibility that the fire might spread to the other 65 tanks in the complex. Says Subramaniam: "The present fire in Cochin Refineries is the biggest ever in Kerala." But until the smoke clears nobody is hazarding a guess as to what caused the fire. —SREEDHAR PILLAI in Cochin

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PUNJAB

People Power



MORE power to the people. That slogan is rapidly becoming more appropriate in Punjab as the people of the state, faced with the increasing inability of the administration and political parties to check lawlessness, take matters into their own hands. Last fortnight more than 30 marches for peace were led by lawyers, teachers, students, farmers and trade unionists. The biggest were in Jalandhar, Ludhiana and Gurdaspur, scenes of recent terrorist shooting sprees. "We no longer depend upon the politicians who have played havoc with the state and we will not let human bonds be torn asunder whatever the cost," declared Dr Gurbaksh Singh, who recently led a peace march through the streets of Bhatinda.

The groups of peace marchers, though relatively small, wield considerable influence and are leaders of public opinion. Soon after the recent killings in Punjab spilled over into Haryana, lawyers boycotted the courts and took to the streets, focusing on government apathy. Punjab Power Board member Jagmeet Singh Brar led peace marches across Ferozepur and Faridkot districts, bastions of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. And that was not all. Students and staff of Punjab Agriculture University and Punjabi University sang peace songs in Ludhiana and Patiala, and determined villagers persuaded their leaders to take part in the peace marches. Most of the killings have taken place in villages and "it is no small task to stop the migration of one community from the villages to the cities in search of refuge," says Brar.

The motto of many of the peace marchers was "*Na Hindu raj, na Khalistan, jug jug jiwe Hindustan*" (neither Hindu nor Khalistan—long live India). It was therefore appropriate that it was not only Punjabis who were trying to cement bonds of amity in the state. From distant Pune a group of students and teachers plan a long peace yatra, to start on March 23 from Hussainiwala (where the ashes of freedom fighters Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were immersed) and to end at Jallianwalla Bagh in Amritsar on April 13, Baisakhi day. The group has stayed in most of the gurudwaras and met Longowal and Bhindranwale. "Ours is the voice of sanity and the response from the people shows it has been heard," says Vivekanand Phadke, one of the group.

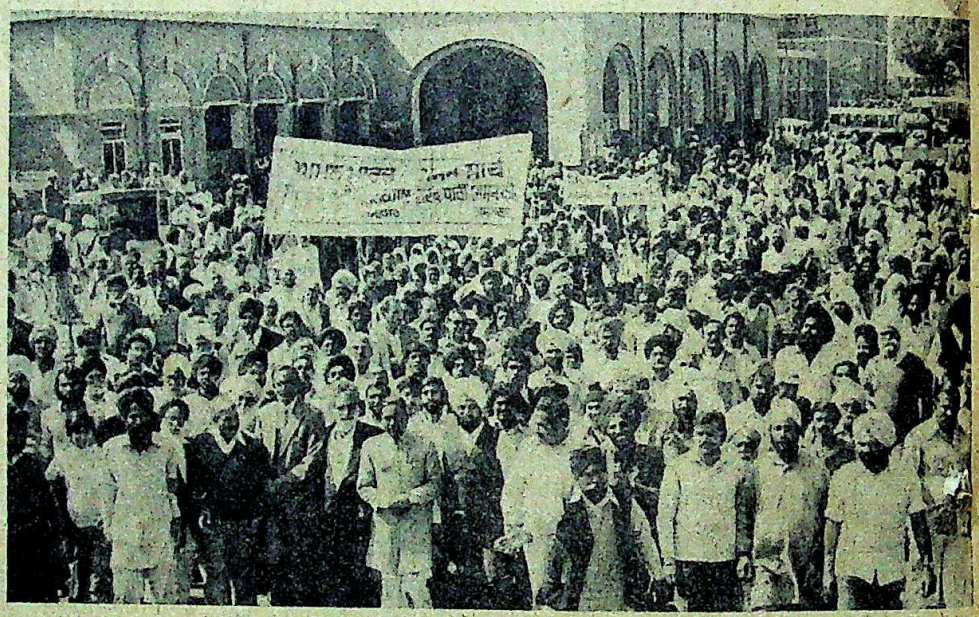
The peace efforts have touched the length and breadth of the state, including Dhilwan—scene of the senseless killing of bus passengers; Berata in Bhatinda; and Doraha and Samrala in Ludhiana. In tandem with these efforts, poets and theatre people too have launched their own campaign. The popular *kavi durbars* are back this time with sanity and brotherhood as themes. Leftist playwright and stage artiste Gursharan Singh has begun a series of street plays, bold and direct, which mock the misdeeds of religious zealots.

It was in Amritsar, the city witnessing the sharpest communal divisions, that the efforts for peace have had some effect. Several hundred people marched to the railway station and re-installed portraits of saints and gurus (including one of Guru Ram Dass, founder of the city) that had been desecrated by mobs during the bandh on February 14. The re-installation ceremony was preceded by a hopeful sign indeed: a kirtan by the head priest of the Golden Temple.

More and more frequently, terrorists are being chased and apprehended by the people. In Cheratta, the industrial suburb of Amritsar, mill workers caught three gun-toting terrorists who had attacked some shopkeepers. In another incident near Moga, one terrorist was killed and a Sten gun and grenades captured. In Amritsar district, villagers chased and helped the police kill four terrorists who had been masquerading as Nihangs. In Dakala village of Patiala district, Sarpanch Sandhu Singh has, besides organising a peace campaign, collected arms with which to face terrorists.

The politicians have begun lending their support. The communists, the BJP and the Janata joined marches in Jalandhar, Amritsar and Ludhiana. The administration too has begun exploring the chances of taking the people along. The new advisor to the governor, Surendra Nath, has put up a plan to build up the confidence of the rural areas, organise defence squads and arm them. "We know the people wish to live in peace and will make united efforts to protect their peace. Hence the defence squads," he says.

Another indicator that the peace marches have instilled some confidence among the bureaucrats is the lifting of night curfew in six Punjab towns after three weeks. While most police officers wished to keep the curfew in force, Nath insisted that it be lifted and forced the governor's council to announce the lifting. Nonetheless, more powers have been given to the paramilitary forces to search, arrest and shoot and the three districts of Gurdaspur, Amritsar and Kapurthala have been declared "dangerously disturbed areas." The bomb blasts and gun shots keep taking a toll of lives—over 200 at last count, and the administration has deployed 148 companies of armed police.

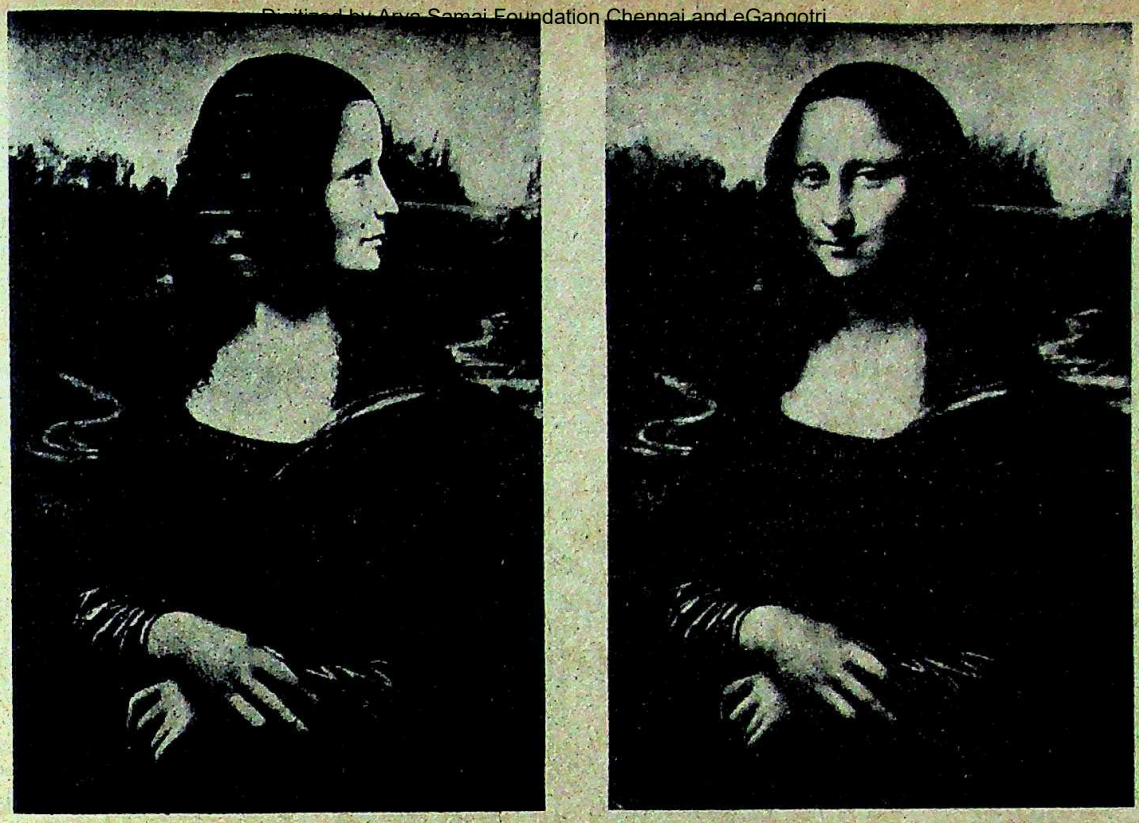


A peace rally in Amritsar: towards communal harmony

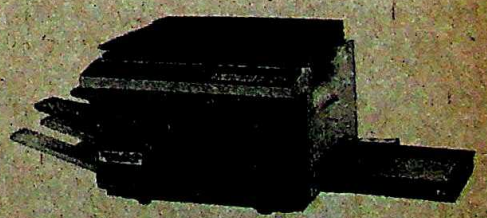
The media too has been realising the futility of relying solely on the Government to deal with the situation. "It is for us, the people of Punjab, to take the lead and not wait for the Government or the politicians to lead us by the nose. We must reject openly all exhortations to promote communal passions or to indulge in reprisals... we the people of Punjab must save ourselves as no one else will do," concluded the *Tribune*'s Chief Editor Prem Bhatia in a signed editorial, the second in a fortnight. Letters from the people of Punjab in reply to this showed that a vast majority of them agreed with this compelling reasoning. —GOBIND THUKRAL

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HARYANA

Suspended Animation

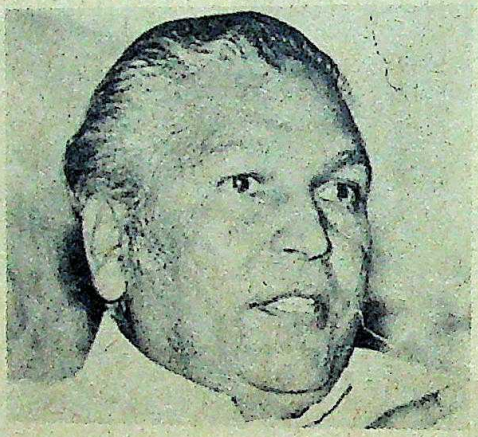
FOR MONTHS, it seemed that nothing would unseat Ganpati Chandra Gupta, vice-chancellor of Kurukshetra University in Haryana, neither charges of corruption and nepotism, nor angry tirades from within the Congress(I). But last fortnight Governor G.D. Tapase finally suspended Gupta and ordered state Chief Secretary P.P. Caprihan to inquire at the earliest into acts of commission and omission by the vice-chancellor. But it was more of a major victory for Chief Minister Bhajan Lal who has been locking horns with Gupta for quite some time now. The Government has filed a caveat in the high court urging that if there is any petition from Gupta the state must be heard before any decision is taken.

The sack Gupta campaign had begun over three months ago when state Congress(I) chief Sultan Singh, MP, handed in a 12-page memorandum demanding Gupta's immediate ouster. "The vice-chancellor has reduced the university to his personal estate through his acts of nepotism and corruption," he charged. The demand for Gupta's ouster cut across party lines: two senior opposition MLA's, Sahib Singh Saini and Kitab Singh Malik, called the chancellor's attention to the "serious lapses, corruption and abuse of power" in the university. State Education Minister Jagdish Nehra lent his weight to the criticism, too, when he told the chief minister that the Government was wasting time in not taking action against the vice-chancellor.

For his part, Gupta has been always contending that politicians were interfering in campus matters, violating the autonomy of the university. He claims that Sultan Singh had once phoned him up, urging him not to take action against certain corrupt university officials. Gupta himself shot off a five-page rebuttal to Tapase on Singh's memorandum citing "political interference", and ironically threatening to resign as a mark of protest against the "false, baseless and derogatory remarks".

In the process, the university was vertically divided with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Ram Prakash publicly alleging that the vice-chancellor was protecting "shady characters", and seeking a judicial probe into the leakage of a question paper. In addition, Gupta was accused of having scuttled university autonomy. The highest governing body, the University Court, has met only once despite official recommendations that it meet at least two to three times a year. The last budget, scheduled to be presented last March, was submitted only in May, and affiliated private colleges which constitute 90 per cent of the total number are feeling increasingly alienated.

There are complaints about the Executive Council as well. Dissenting observations of important functionaries like Ram Prakash or O.P. Bhardwaj, director of higher education, have allegedly not been recorded.



Vice-Chancellor Gupta: trading charges

Gupta has also been accused of ignoring the major funding agency—the Government.

Facing charges of nepotism or mismanagement is not a new experience for Gupta. In his earlier appointment as the vice-chancellor of Himachal Pradesh University, he had faced a similar inquiry but resigned before the commission submitted its finding. Chet Ram Thakur, retired judge of the Himachal Pradesh High Court, in his report submitted on March 7, 1980, had declared: "There is no room for doubt that there are irregularities, mismanagement and corruption in the university and the principal executive is responsible...a person not capable of exercising his control and maintaining discipline in the institution is quite unfit to be the head of the institution." Gupta's five-year tenure was abruptly cut when he quit after 18 months, after vainly trying to scuttle the inquiry by going to the courts.

In Kurukshetra, Gupta again faces serious charges of favouritism. One relates to the appointment of his son, Ramesh Gupta, as a lecturer in Hindi department against a position reserved for Scheduled Castes. Although the appointment has been challenged in the Punjab and Haryana High Court, Ramesh has received five advance increments. The vice-chancellor's elder daughter, Chander Kala Gupta, a University Grants Commission (UGC) scholar, has been registered for D.Litt. under a special provision—there has been no provision for this so far in the university, and UGC approval was obtained only after her admission. His second daughter, Chandrika, was rejected by the university when she tried to register for Ph.D., as her M.A. marks were too low to qualify her for the registration—but at a specially convened meeting of the deans of university, the qualification was relaxed. Gupta, his critics charge, used his emergency powers to enforce the guidelines—in this case without awaiting formal approval of the Academic Council.

Featuring prominently in the controversy is a biography of Tapase entitled *From Mud House to Raj Bhavan* written by Gupta. Critics of the vice-chancellor allege that he wrote the book to win Tapase's favour, and give this as the reason for Tapase's reluctance to act on their complaints. "These are only mischievous reports trying to tarnish my image and spoil my good relations with the chancellor," retorts Gupta. The facts of the case are, nonetheless, interesting. The book's publisher is a Chandrika, M.A., of Sadhna Publications, 29-Sector 16 A, Chandigarh. Gupta has a daughter called Chandrika who is an M.A., and his friend O.P Arora, a council member of the university, happens to live at that particular address. The jacket of the book was printed at the university press and the bills have been made out to a Ramesh Gupta—the vice-chancellor's son is also called Ramesh Gupta. Many university officials are unwilling to believe in such a rare and abundant display of coincidence.

But most interestingly, Tapase himself disclaims all knowledge of the publisher. "I do not know who the publisher is and who the printers are," he says. A staff officer explains loftily: "The governor has many more important things on hand."

But for Gupta, neither his alleged connection with the chancellor nor his various politically flavoured ploys stayed the axe: he had appointed a 'sadachar' committee on the campus and organised rallies of his supporters before invited newsmen. At one point it looked as if the man who had protested perhaps too much about "political interference" would almost overshadow the wily chief minister. His strategy involved the setting up of a cell to implement the prime minister's 20-point programme, the printing of a calendar featuring a portrait of Mrs Gandhi and and even setting up of anti-corruption committee at a public meeting on the campus, an unprecedented move neither permitted by the university statute nor by convention. He even suggested ways to end the Punjab crisis. But it is the looming crisis in his own career that he should rightly be worrying about.

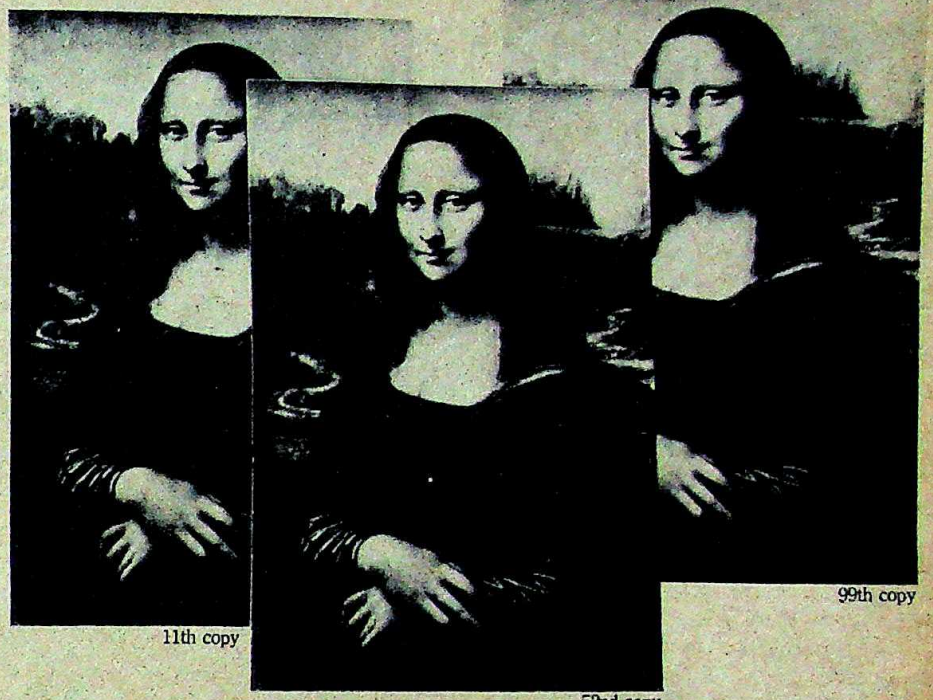
—GOBIND THUKRAL in Kurukshetra

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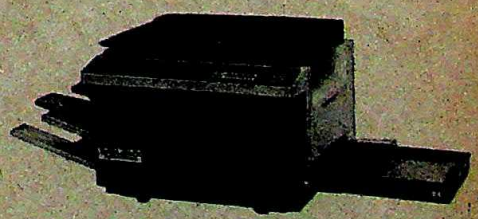


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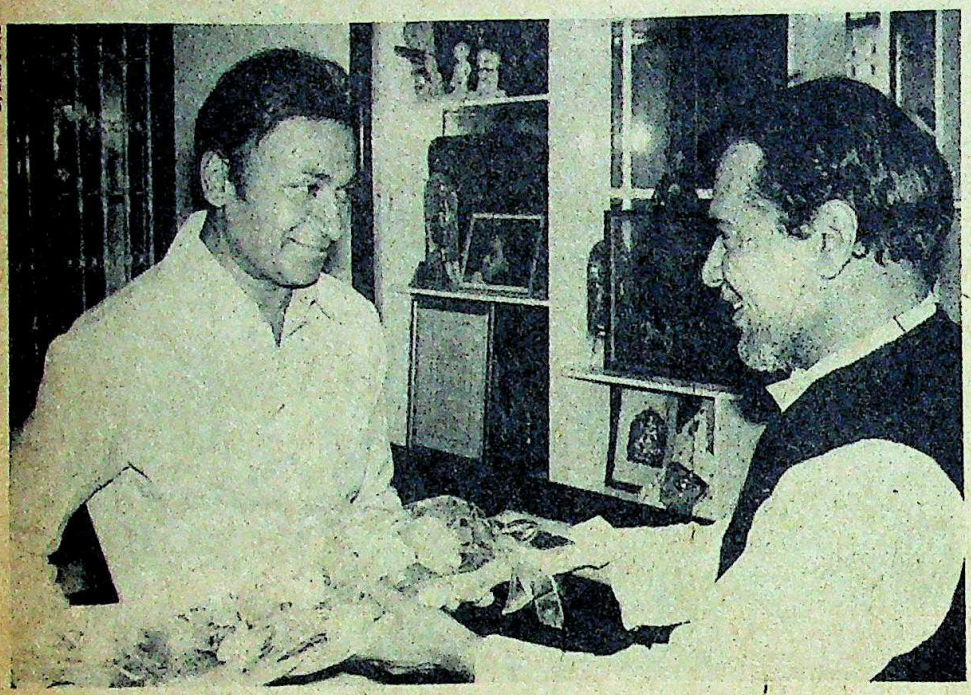
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D. BABURAJ

Hegde (right) commiserates with Rajkumar: allegations and counter-allegations

KARNATAKA

Language Lesson

FILM stars in the south have a way of rousing mass hysteria. There was ample evidence of this in both Karnataka and Tamil Nadu following an attack on Karnataka matinee idol Rajkumar at Udagamandalam (Ooty) in Tamil Nadu on March 3. The violence that followed in both states quickly assumed a linguistic colouring. In Bangalore the next day, angry Rajkumar fans went on protest marches during which a 19-year-old Tamilian youth Angamuthu was stabbed and vehicles with Tamil Nadu registration numbers were attacked; across the border in Madras, anti-Rajkumar demonstrators attacked a hotel run by a Kannadiga and stoned a Karnataka Tourism Development Corporation bus.

The violence was devastating. The Janata Party office in Bangalore, where party elections were then being held was attacked, three party workers assaulted and five parked cars smashed up. Bangalore Transport Service buses, shops and petrol bunks were also destroyed. Violence spilt over to Hosur, a bustling industrial town across the border in Tamil Nadu. Lorries were damaged—a loss of Rs 10 lakh. Buses were halted on both sides of the border, and the hapless passengers made to trudge on foot between Hosur and Attibele, a town just inside Karnataka. Shimoga, Mandya and Chitradurga saw bandhs and protests, and protesting students in Bangalore burnt an effigy of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran.

Members of the Akhila Karnataka Dr Rajkumar Abhimangala Sangha (the fans association) insist that they had nothing to do with either the violence that marred the January 18 Bangalore bandh, nor last fortnight's incidents in the city. They say theirs is just a social service organisation. But in fact the association demanded of Tamil film distributors in the city that they stop screening Tamil films until March 22. The distributors agreed. Meanwhile Bangalore police totted up the damage caused by the violence that began on March 4 and continued sporadically till March 7: 500 vehicles damaged, 67 people including 40 policemen injured, and over 300 arrested.

The exercise demonstrated how frighteningly volatile the language issue has become. Rajkumar, for his part has associated himself with the Kannada cause in no uncertain terms. The biggest outbreak of linguistic violence since the Gokak agitation in 1982 came early this year during the Bangalore bandh called on January 18. It sought to stress the actor's uncompromising stand on the issue of a compulsory Kannada test for those seeking class three and four employment with the state Government (INDIA TODAY, February 15).

Rajkumar, still looking slightly shocked three days after the attack, recalled the details of the incident. On March 3, the pre-lunch shooting for Dakshayini Combine's *Yaarivanu* (who is that man) involving the actor and heroine Roopa Devi closed satisfactorily at one corner of the scenic Ooty lake. All through the shooting, some young men had been shouting slogans on the other bank of the lake.

Suddenly about 30 of them armed with cycle chains and razors scaled the fences and advanced on the unit. "Who is this fellow Rajkumar?" asked one of them rudely, according to the actor. He then stepped forward, and was grabbed by his shirt. Swiftly, 15 of the unit men formed a human wall around him and tried to take the blows that trained down. But although somewhat protected, Rajkumar received a few blows, lost his wig, and his heroine was bitten on the thigh and shoulder.

In the midst of this melee, a young man climbed onto a mound shouting and threatening to kill himself if the attackers did not stop. Strangely, the mob let up and actually dispersed at this. The young man then prostrated himself at Rajkumar's feet, apologising and crying that he had been told it was only to be a black flag demonstration, with no violence.

After the hero assured the youth that he was all right, the unit packed up, picking up Rajkumar's family before speeding away to Bangalore, the shooting abandoned. One of his sons was also beaten up. Said he: "If my wife, mother and daughters had been on the scene during the violence, I would have shed my dazed stance and swung into action." He joked: "But as it was, this was one time the hero did not plunge into a fight in reality."

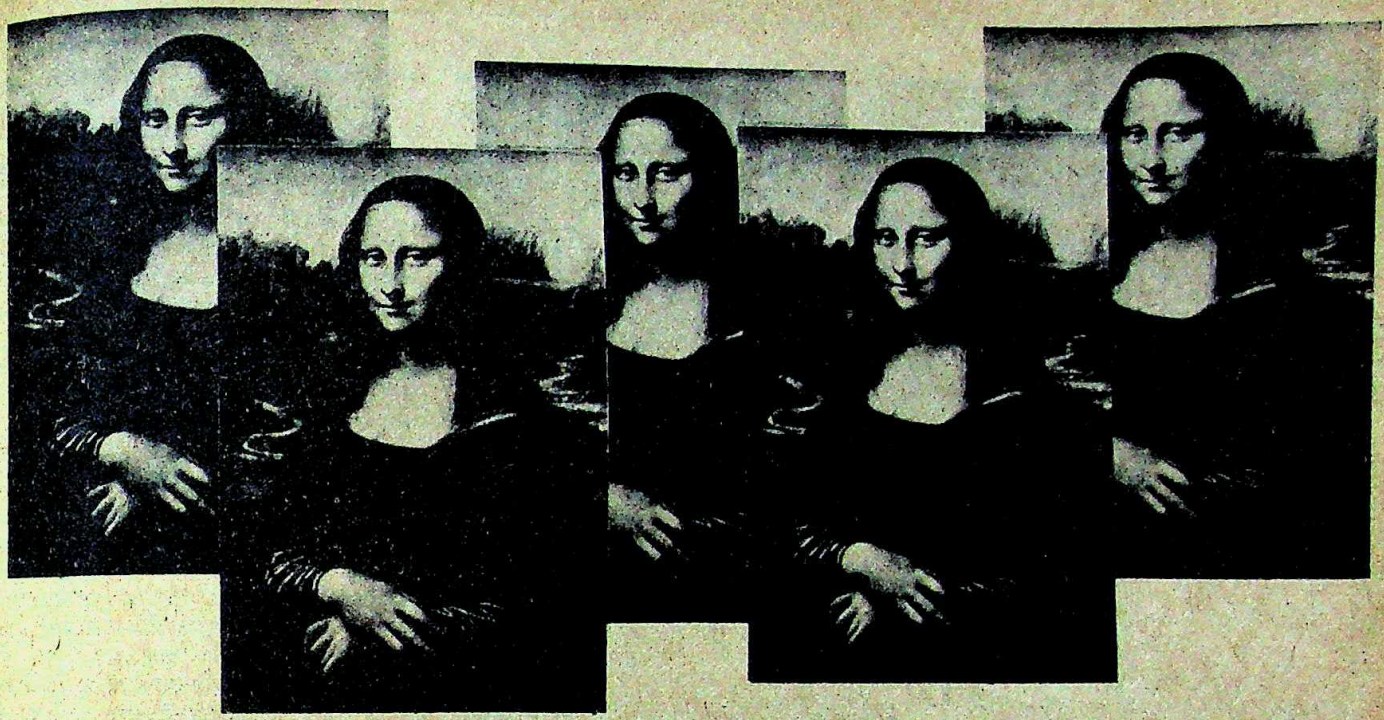
The violent protests that followed in Bangalore are just one indication of the tremendous clout he wields. A primary school drop-out and considered by some to be a political innocent, Rajkumar is the veteran of 187 Kannada films in a career that has spanned 30 years. He has received the state's best film actor award eight times, and his films received a dozen state awards and 13 central awards. The honorary doctorate conferred on him by the Mysore University in 1976 and the Padma Bhushan he was awarded last year added dramatically to his stature.

But his major plank for entering public life has been the Kannada language. He has often vowed that he is "prepared to die" for the cause, and publicly shed tears talking about "Mother Kannada". And in April 17, 1982, he lent his considerable weight to the Gokak agitation (INDIA TODAY, May 15, 1982). It was his presence in the language stir that showed up the then chief minister Gundu Rao in a poor light, and contributed to his exit from the centre-stage.

Naturally the fact of his being roughed

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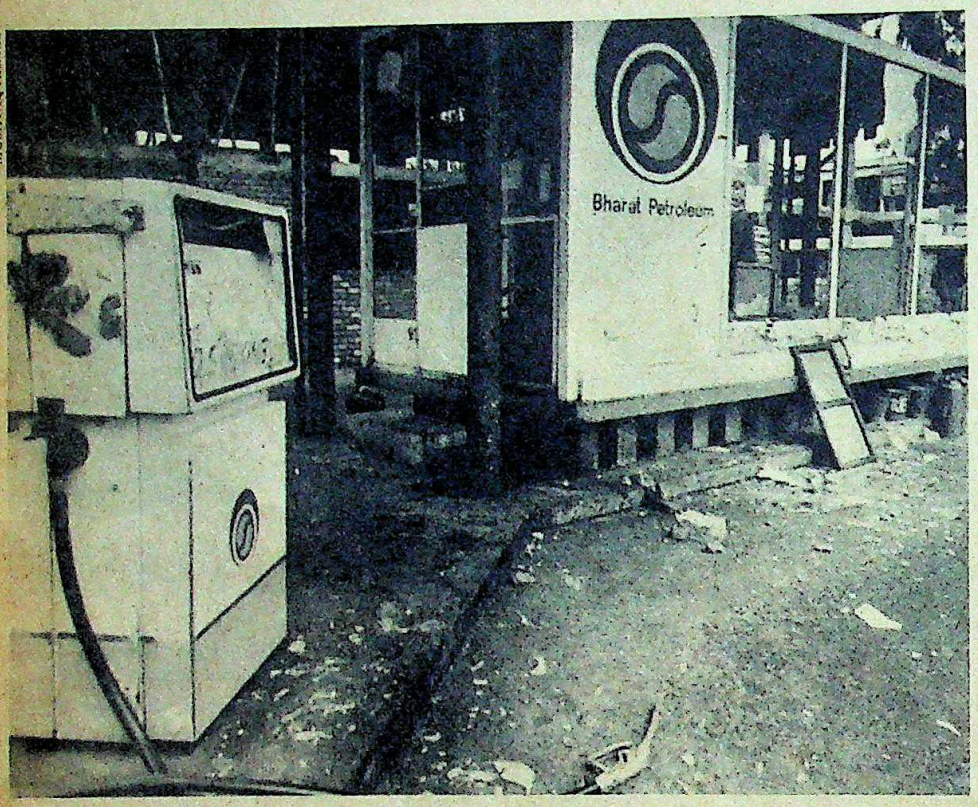
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MUSHTAQ AHMED



A petrol bunk damaged in the Bangalore rioting: violent backlash

up has become a major issue in the state. In the welter of allegations that followed, the Janata Party and A.K. Subbiah, the Kannada Nadu chief and former BJP strongman featured prominently as the forces to blame. Parvathamma Rajkumar, the actor's wife and the leaders of his fans association claim the Ooty mob hailed Subbiah and the Janata Party in loud voices. They say the immediate provocation for the attack actually came from a press conference Subbiah had held in Madras on February 25. They claim the legislator had charged Rajkumar with being a "double dealer". Subbiah is said to have accused the actor of trying to convince the people of Tamil Nadu that he was not anti-Tamil, while back in Karnataka he whipped up hostility against linguistic minorities, particularly Tamilians.

RAJKUMAR'S family is sore with Hegde—they believe he should have prevented Subbiah from holding his press conference. Chinne Gowda, Parvathamma's brother, says: "Subbiah has the Janata Government's backing. Hegde says he can do nothing as Subbiah is an MLC. Does that mean that legislators can do anything?" The family does not blame the Tamil Nadu Government, though it does think that the police in Ooty did not protect the film star. A piqued Chinne Gowda adds: "While MGR reacted with concern immediately through phone calls and wires, Hegde came at least three days later to see him."

Hegde dismisses allegations of Janata involvement in the affair. "This is fantastic nonsense," he says, adding cautiously, "certain sections stand to benefit if relations between Rajkumar and me are soured. They are trying to set his fans association or at least some sections of it against me." He says that the understanding reached between him and the actor on the Kannada test issue had riled some people—the second round of talks scheduled for March 12 was put off at Rajkumar's request.

Subbiah says that it is the Congress(I) that is behind the episode. "They want to make use of the film star to topple the Janata Government," he says. He claims that even MGR is soft-pedalling the issue because of pressure from the Congress(I).

In Madras the entire incident was dismissed as a storm in a teacup, but the chief minister ordered a judicial probe. The Nilgiris Superintendent of Police S. Ramani was transferred, and the Head Constable of Ooty town west police station, Narasimhaiah, was suspended. Police sources in Madras called it an "overworked incident", though "unfortunate". Fifty-one people were arrested, and Nilgiris Collecter N. Adimoolam says: "We have not gone into the regional backgrounds of the arrested persons to be able to say whether all of them are Tamilians."

However, police sources in the Nilgiris and Madras confirm that most of the arrested are Tamilian students and antisocial elements. But none of them was carrying weapons, they say. One official says: "Some of them had their cycles along with them. But that doesn't mean they were armed with cycle chains."

In the Tamil Nadu Legislature, V.R. Nedunchezhiyan, leader of the Assembly, explained that the film unit had sought police protection on February 28, which was granted from the next day on. When shooting began with police protection, nothing untoward occurred. But on March 3, the police was taken by surprise because the unit suddenly decided to change the locale, said Nedunchezhiyan. Then a group of "anti-social elements" had an altercation with the film unit, and insisted that Rajkumar should declare he respected Tamilians. Rajkumar refused to talk to them, and in the melee that followed some were injured. Later the unit packed up and left for Bangalore.

Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde and members of both houses of the legislature roundly condemned the attack. Hegde assured the Upper House that violence—referring to the Bangalore incidents—would be crushed by the Janata Government which would not hesitate to open fire in order to achieve its aim. However, he said he did not believe a probe was warranted in Karnataka. Congress (I) and Karnataka Kranti Ranga MLA's were peeved that Hegde refused to institute a probe into allegations that Janata ministers M. Raghupathy and Jeevaraj Alva were involved in the Ooty incidents. They said the attackers had mentioned their names as well.

More riotous scenes followed when Kranti Ranga MLA's—their leader S. Bangarappa stayed aloof—staged a dharna in the house. When an unmoved Speaker D.B. Chandre Gowda continued with the next item on the agenda, Kranti Ranga MLA G.M. Kanade snatched his mike, and the house was adjourned. The next day, again Kranti Ranga members staged a walk-out on the same demand.

Tamil Nadu's AIADMK didn't hold back either. Trying to get as much mileage as possible out of the violent backlash in Bangalore, R. Ramakrishnan, a party MP in the Rajya Sabha, urged Mrs Gandhi to institute an inquiry into the murder of another Tamilian youth in Bangalore on the night of March 4. Although the police declared his death was not related to the other events, Ramakrishnan maintained that the Rajkumar fans association was responsible for the fatal stabbing of 20-year-old Kadirvelu.

While accusations and counter-accusations continue to be made all around, it is clear that the politicians are not addressing themselves to the crucial issue of the language fanaticism that has already swept both states.

—K. BHANUMATHI

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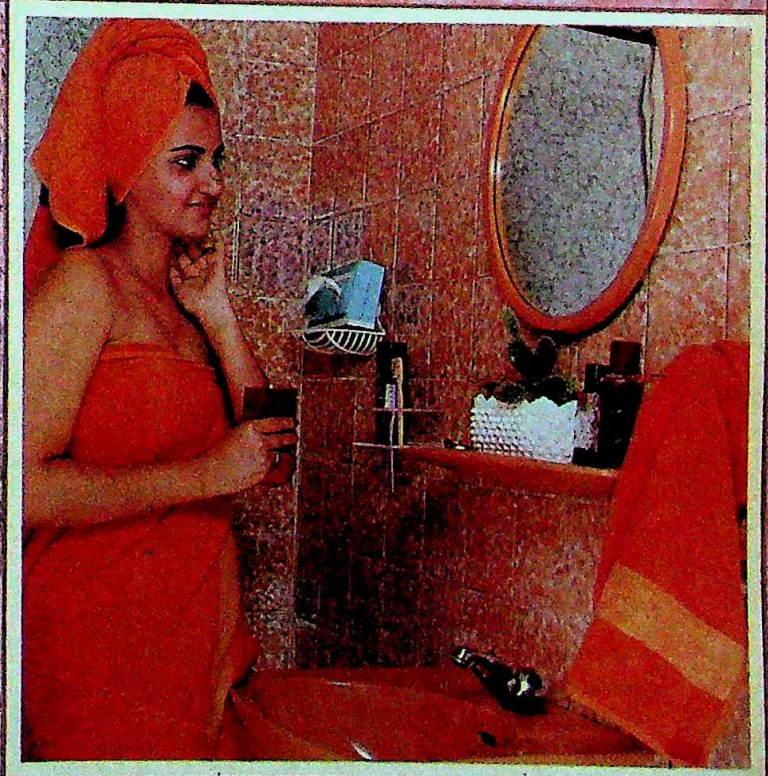


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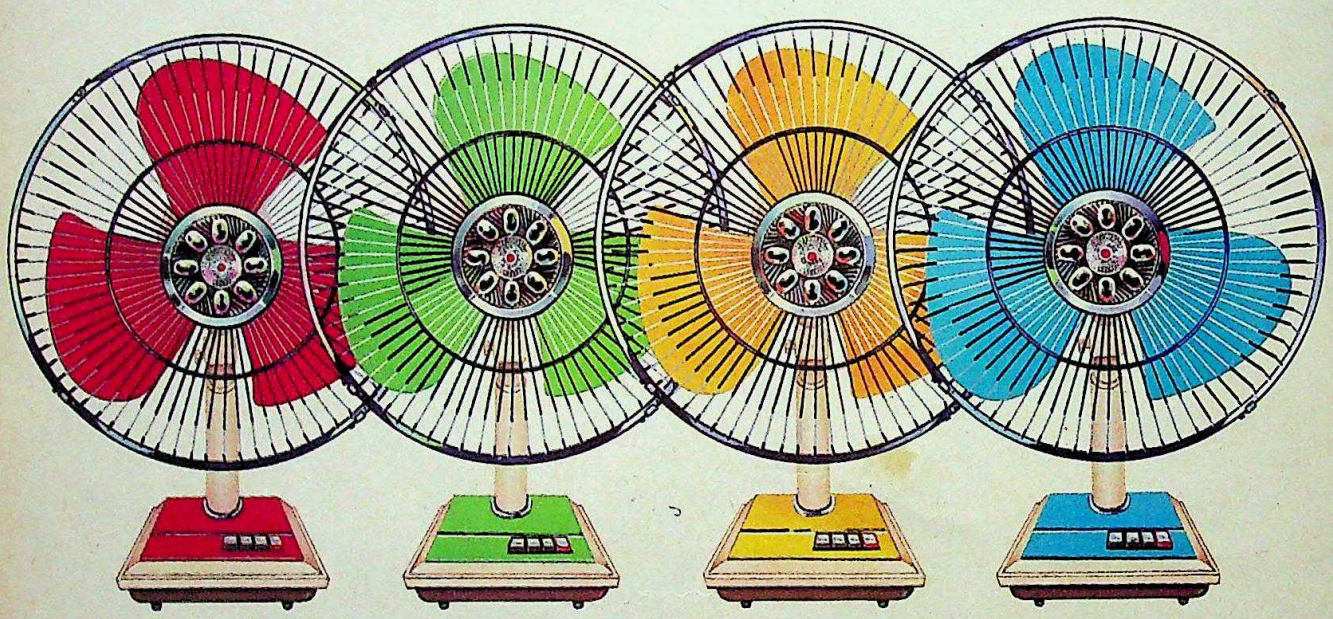
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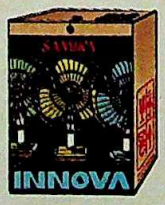


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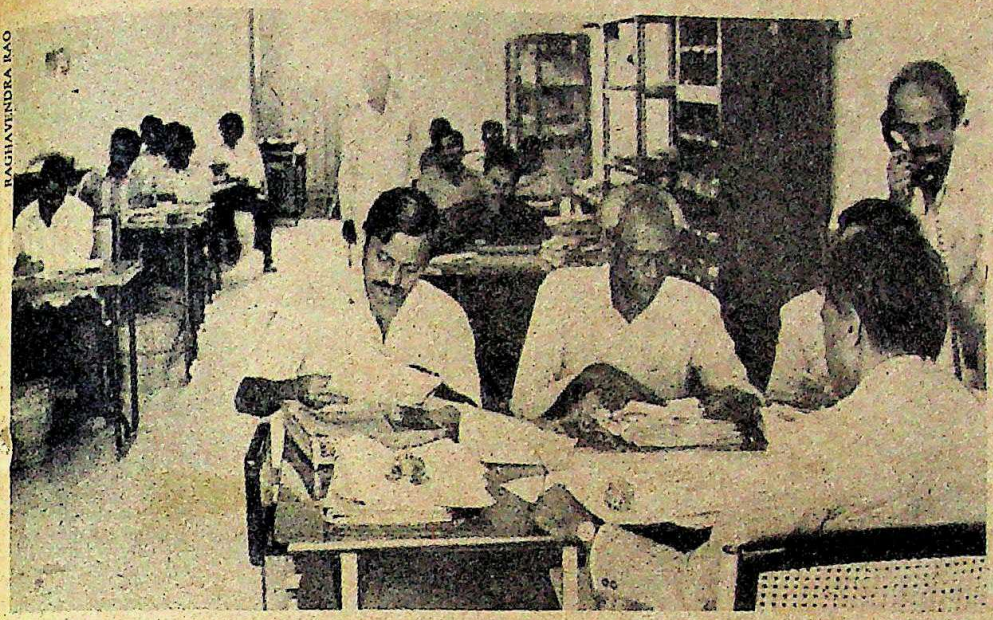
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RAGHAVENDRA RAO

PGO officials at work: tactful handling

KARNATAKA

Settling Grievances



SATTAR Gaffar's husband died a hero. When a fire broke out in a house in Gonikoppal village of Kodagu district in Karnataka, Gaffar rushed to rescue the victims—only to die of burn injuries himself. The fact that he died nobly was no consolation to his grieving widow, now left penniless and alone with three children to support. In desperation she wrote to the Public Grievance Organisation (PGO) for help. Acting surprisingly quickly for a government department, the PGO sent an application to Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde. A sum of Rs 500 was immediately sanctioned and an additional pension of Rs 50 every month. Gaffar was even recommended for a national bravery award.

Sattar Gaffar is one of some 7,352 individuals who have benefited from the PGO's office. It was set up by the Janata Government last July and is the only such organisation in the country with a Cabinet minister in charge. The decision to form a separate organisation of this kind was predictably greeted with scepticism. Veerappa Moily, Congress(I) leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, scoffed: "It is formed only to pass the buck among government officials. By creating a separate organisation, the chief minister is building a wall between himself and the people." But now even the most hardened critics are coming around. As the phlegmatic A. Lakshmisagar, minister for public grievances, law and housing, explains: "The buck is not passed any more. It stops here."

The people's response to it has certainly been enthusiastic: in the past seven months, a flood of 43,282 petitions landed at the PGO's doors, with an average of almost 200 coming in every day. Of these over half the total number had to be sent back. They related to transfers, promotions, and allegations of corruption against government officials, over which the PGO says it has no jurisdiction. But of the remaining 17,852 petitions, the PGO has settled nearly 45 per cent—7,352. They ranged from land disputes to payment of pension and allotment of houses. Almost one-third concerned the Revenue Department, relating mainly to problems of land acquisition and ownership disputes. The other two departments named frequently in the petitions were the home and education. It took the PGO between 15 days and two months on an average to attend to the grievances.

The PGO did have a predecessor of sorts in the Public Grievance Cell similar to those the states of Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal also have. But the cell, as an official puts it, only acted as a "post office"—it received petitions and passed them on to the concerned departments, but had no provision or staff to follow them up. To make the organisation truly effective, the Government passed an order on July 1, 1983, laying down the rules and procedures to be followed in dealing with public grievances. At the secretariat level, the PGO was attached to the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms, with a deputy secretary in charge. He was given two under-secretaries and six section officers to assist him. This formed the core of the PGO which supervised and reviewed the work done in the districts. At the district level, the deputy commissioner was made grievance officer, assisted at the divisional and taluk levels by assistant commissioners and tehsildars.

To keep track of the grievances, a simple card system was worked out. When a person handed in a grievance petition, it would immediately be registered and a green confirmation card sent to him describing what action would be taken, and within what time—15 days for urgent matters, and one month for others. The grievance officer would then attach a card (red if urgent, green if not) and pass it on to the officer directly concerned with redressing the grievance. This officer would in turn write to the petitioner informing him of what action would be taken.

Marking a departure from the usual bureaucratic procedures, PGO officials were told to make trunk calls or send telegrams to speed up the disposal of the petitions, falling back on letters only if the two quicker alternatives were not available. They were also given the power to ask for the relevant files, even seize them if necessary, inspect offices and take disciplinary action against erring officials to the extent of suspending or demoting them. Deputy commissioners are required to file reviews of progress every fortnight. Says Lakshmisagar: "We have told all the officers to give top priority to public grievances and to make sure there is no backlog of cases."

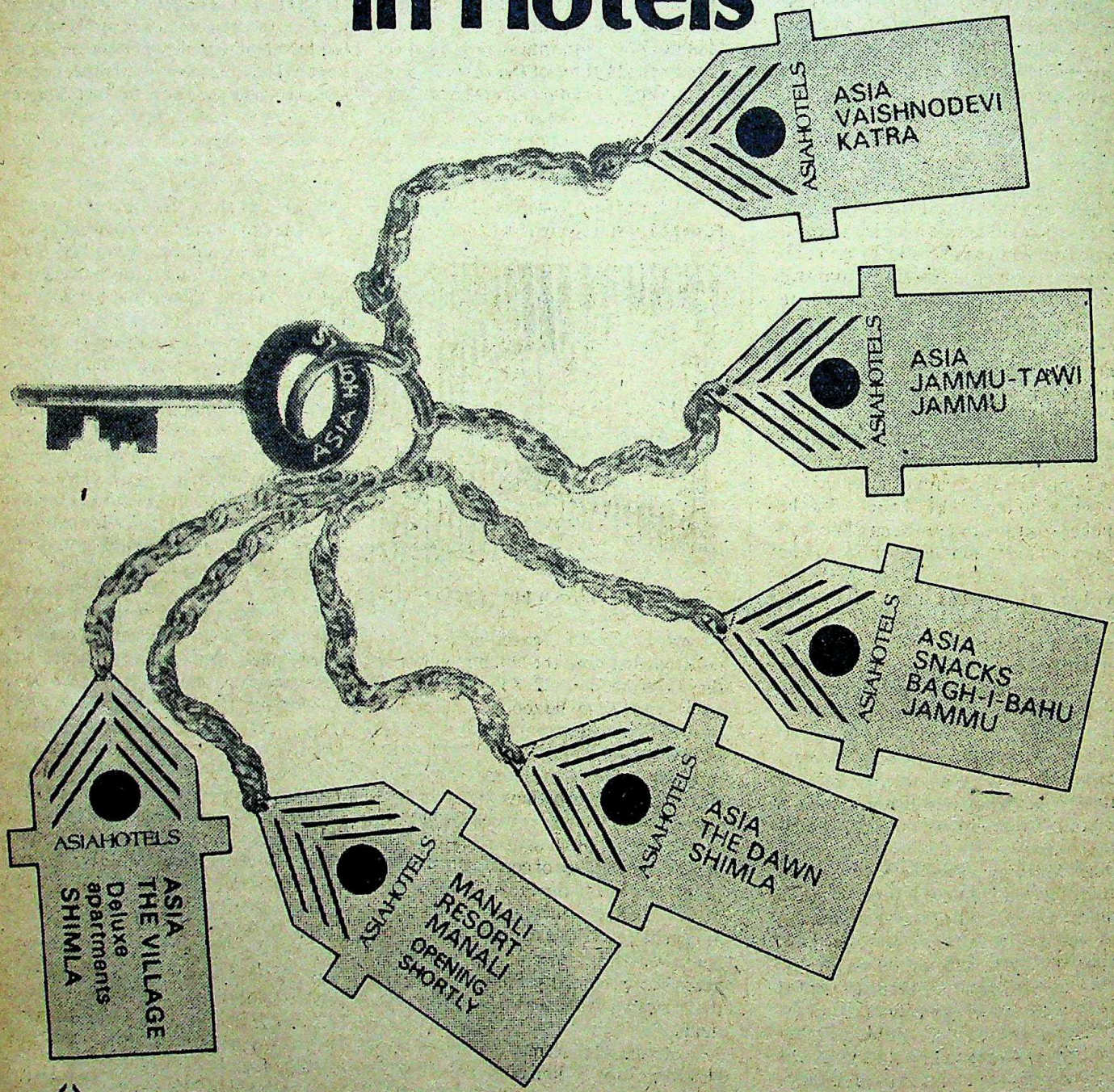
Such measures have certainly helped. The headquarters of the department on the first floor of the Vidhana Soudha in Bangalore is thronged with petitioners all day, and three-quarters of the total applications received by the PGO land here. Officials attending to them go by the rule: "No grievances will go unread or unattended." D. Puttaswamy, an under-secretary, says: "We don't get suited and booted people here. The very poor and illiterate come here for help. We never raise their hopes. We tell them that we would only accelerate the process of their grievance being settled either way."

Due to the peculiar requirements of individual cases, PGO officials are having to bring unusual skills to their jobs—tact, understanding, and even a sense of humour. For instance, N.R. Venkatachar of Siddalghatta in Kolar district posed a perplexing problem to officials when he refused to accept Rs 934 from the taluk office in compensation after his land was acquired by the Government. His reasons: he couldn't get on with the tehsildar. After two months of negotiations, department officials broke the stalemate and solved a tricky problem by asking Venkatachar to collect the money from a local treasury instead of the tehsildar's office.

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In another case, S.S. Bhadya, a teacher in a government school in suburban Bangalore retired in 1982. His troubles began immediately after—trying to get his pension commuted, he went to the Directorate of Public Instruction (DPI). For 18 months indifferent officials shrugged him off or shunted him to other officials. But last August, the frustrated teacher finally went to the PGO, who settled his complaints.

In Dharwad, a landless agricultural labourer called Lingarappa Bidigera put in a diffident plea for a modest 3 acres of land. The petition went in November. By December he had been sanctioned the land.

If these cases illustrate a judicious cultivation of tact and compassion by PGO officials, there are numerous instances to prove that exasperation and a lack of humour are luxuries PGO officials simply cannot afford. Last month T. Sudarshan of Mysore stormed into the department's office threatening to murder a government official. His provocation was that his name featured in the rogue's gallery on Devaraja police station in Mysore city. While he loudly protested his innocence and breathed curses on the wrongdoer, officials quietly checked back with the local police—sure enough, Sudarshan had nine cases against him, according to the police.

As is inevitable with any nascent organisation, the department still has some debugging to do before the system can function with greater efficiency. For one thing, some district officials are being deliberately uncooperative, delaying the disposal of grievances. This had in some cases led to the standard bureaucratic reply from embarrassed PGO officials: "We are looking into it." But after the Government threatened to take action against recalcitrant officials, the situation improved.

Other problems, seemingly minor, still have to be tackled before the benefits of the department are passed on to the common man. A tehsildar in Kodagu has a grievance: the typist and the clerk promised by the Government have not yet been appointed leading to a pile-up of grievances. In Chikmagalur, another tehsildar complained that he wasn't given money to buy stamps for the registration cards to be posted to the petitioners. He was having to pay for it with his own money.

Such problems are easily sorted out, however, and Lakshmisagar says: "The PGO has proved to be the surest way of quantifying and attending to public grievances. We now have a good ear for public complaints." If that is matched by an equally effective hand, Karnataka can certainly boast of being sympathetic to the problems of the common man.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

MYSORE ZOO

Cub Curbs

IN INDIA it is not only people who need to plan the size of their families. Lions need to do so too, as the Mysore Zoo authorities have realised. Last fortnight three of the zoo's 13 lions underwent vasectomy operations. Says Krishne Gowda, the zoo curator: "If we don't regulate their population we would need to buy up half of Mysore city to accommodate them."

The decision to sterilise the lions was hastened last fortnight when Ganga, a 12-year-old lioness, gave birth to four cubs and increased the lion population in the zoo from 18 to 22. Already the lions are so cramped in the zoo, which is spread over 250 acres, that some of them have to be housed in monkey cages. The zoo authorities' efforts to sell the lions to a circus or other zoos have not met with success. Says Gowda exasperatedly: "No one seems to want lions even if we want to give them away free of cost." Much of the problem is due to the Indian Wildlife Act of 1972, which puts lions on the endangered list. They can be reared only by zoos and no member of the public can keep them in captivity. So there is no way the zoo can give them away free to individuals.



Dr Schaffer gives a pre-operation tranquilliser

Sterilisation seemed to be the only way to control the lion population because releasing them back into the wilds would not have been feasible. As Sally Walker, convenor of Friends of Mysore Zoo, a voluntary organisation, puts it: "Introducing wildlife back into the forests would destroy the delicate ecological balance in that area. It is also unlikely that the lions would survive for long in the jungle. They have not been taught to hunt for their food or defend themselves against other animals in a jungle where the only law is survival of the fittest."

Wild animals had never been sterilised in the country before because there was no need to and therefore hardly anyone specialised in such operations. Fortunately for the zoo Dr Nan Schaffer, an expert in reproductive physiology for the Chicago area zoos was in New Delhi last fortnight to collect lion semen for research. The Chicago zoos were keen to introduce a new gene pool for their lions to prevent too much inbreeding, which seems to weaken them. Schaffer was also competent to handle vasectomy operations and she agreed to come to Mysore and perform them free of cost.

The procedure for vasectomy operations on lions is not very different from that for humans, and as the 32-year-old Schaffer put it, "You just dope them and do it." Doping them is not as simple as Schaffer makes it out to be. Just walking up to the lion and putting a tranquilliser into its body would be dangerous for the lion would just turn around and attack whoever attempted it. Doctors now use a blow gun very similar to the toy guns used by children to inject the tranquilliser.

When the lion is unconscious minor surgery is performed on its testicles which blocks the sperm duct. The operation takes two hours and after that the lion is back on its feet. The incision takes about two weeks to heal and few complications have been reported.

Mysore Zoo boasts of being a pioneer in breeding lions. The zoo acquired its first two lions in 1968 when there was a controversy about whether lions breed well in captivity. Lions live for about 20 years and reach maturity within three. A lioness can give birth to cubs every two years.

The lions in the zoo bred so rapidly that within 12 years 18 lions had been given to other zoos in the country, six sold to circuses and another 16 given to the Bannerghatta National Park in Bangalore. After that the demand for lions fell. At present to feed a lion 10 kg of beef worth Rs 40 has to be bought every day. The lions also need a minimum open expanse of 100 sq m each to romp around in.

But, operation or no operation, the instincts of Mysore Zoo's lions seemed to have suffered no impairment. Two days after his operation, Shankar, one of the sterilised lions, was already busy courting Ganga. A relieved Gowda said: "Thank God he can't produce any more lions."

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

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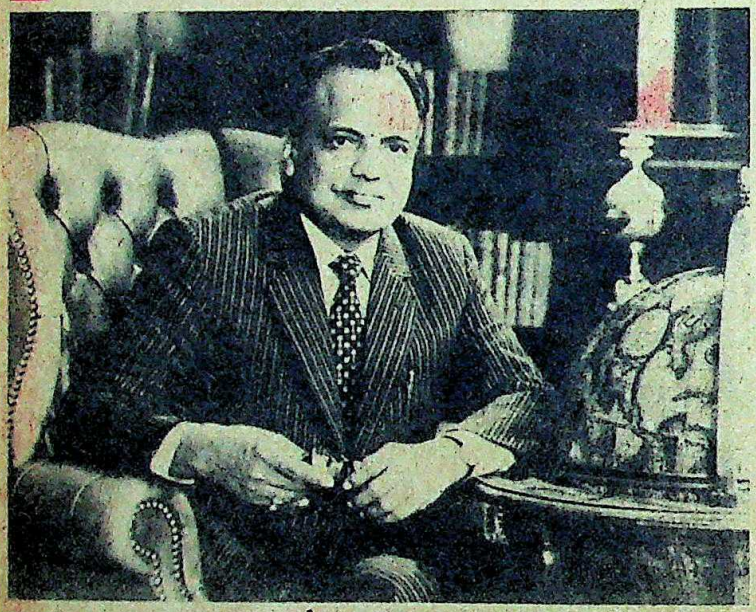
CHAIRMAN'S SPEECH

JINDAL Strips Ltd.

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The following is the address of the Chairman Shri O.P. Jindal at the 12th Annual General Meeting of the Company held on 29th day of December, 1983.



O.P. JINDAL Chairman

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to once again welcome you all to the Twelfth Annual General Meeting of your Company. I wish to express my sincere thanks to all of you for having spared your valuable time for attending this Annual General Meeting. I also take this opportunity to wish you all a most happy and prosperous New Year.

The annual report and the audited accounts for the year ending 30th June, 1983 have been with you for sometime and with your permission I take them as read.

Today we have all assembled together during a phase when almost all industrialised countries are facing recessionary conditions, the repercussions of which are bound to affect the developing countries.

The impacts have hit our country to a larger proportion because of erratic monsoon and Perennial shortage of power. We are proud to have a dynamic Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi, with whose concept of a strong and stable government at the Centre and the policies pursued by her, the much staggered economy has been improved. Further with the assurance of credit ease policy given by the RBI, renewed confidence has been inculcated within the industrial circles.

However, I would like to mention here that the further lowering of interest rate should be considered by the RBI for the industrial growth within the country.

PERFORMANCE RECORD.

I am pleased to report, yet another year of all round progress. The company's progress for the year 1982-83 gives cause for satisfaction. The turnover of Rs.41.35 crores showed an increase of 41.80% over the previous years' of 18 months turnover of Rs.43.75 crores. The profit before interest and depreciation during the period under report was at Rs.3.40 crores as against the profit of Rs.3.00 crores during the previous year. The net profit after providing depreciation and donation to Rural Development Trust amounted to Rs.128.14 lacs as against the net profit of Rs.145.88 lacs during the previous year of 18 months which shows an yearly improvement of 31.76% over the previous year's profit even after suffering a loss of Rs.55.87 lacs during the first year's operation of its second unit at village Vasind, Bombay.

Inspite of better achievements made during the current year the proportionate increase in achievements as compared to that of previous years could not be made because of the various reasons such as deteriorating power availability position, increase in rates of raw material viz. Nickel, Ferro Chrome, and other in-puts and also because of the customs duty hike for raw-materials in relation to the import of Hot Rolled Strips by the Government itself and that too at much lower rates of custom duty. Recently the Govt. have taken certain steps in respect of duty which has discouraged stainless steel industry. The Govt. have increased the custom duty on raw material required for manufacturing of Stainless Steel, whereas the custom duty on the import of Hot Rolled Strips has been lowered, thus inflicting a great set-back to indigenuous Stainless Steel industry.

All of us are aware that industries depend very much on power. Like last year, this year too the State of Haryana has been experiencing a severe shortage of power which has directly affected us. We have been facing acute shortage of power, further punctuated by unprecedented load restrictions and total power cuts imposed by BBMB. Our present source of power is from 33 KV Sub-Station of HSEB which does not function properly due to overaged and repaired installed equipments. As such we have decided to set up our own 132 KV Sub-Station which would not only ensure smooth supply of power but would also prove economical by way of saving of surcharge on power bills.

Moreover, we have been facing an acute shortage of liquid Oxygen and Argon gases which has hampered our production to a great extent. We have thus planned to set up our own Oxygen and Argon Gas plant for which we have been granted a Letter of Intent from the Government of India. Commissioning of both the above said Sub-Station and Oxygen-Argon gas plants are in progress.

From the day I have been at the helms of affairs, I have been pursuing the policy to adopt new technology achieved by way of experimentation and to design and erect new machines, required in the process, all by ourselves, without any know-how from outside. My young team of Engineers and workers have worked with me in the same direction. We have succeeded in modernizing our mill, improving our quality and in diversifying our products.

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Chairman's Speech Contd.

I am happy to mention that the Continuous Casting Plant which was on our Agenda last year has since been commissioned and regular production has started.

I take it as a matter of pride that because of the commendable and appreciable continued work done by our R&D team by maintaining stringent quality control measures, both during in process and after process checks, our products continued to be in high demand by the Engineering Industries, Automobile Industries, Railways, Defence services, Construction projects, Agricultural and Thermo Projects etc.

For your information I wish to say that at the time of inception, our initial licence was for the manufacture of 15,000 M.Ts. of Hot Rolled Strips against the installed capacity of 60,000 M.Ts. We had taken up the matter with the Govt. of India to regularise this capacity and I understand that the Licenced capacity for manufacture of 30,000 M.Ts. would be granted.

As for the Ingots where the licensed capacity would be raised from the present 18,000 M.Ts. to 36,000 M.Ts.

Another happy event is that the previously decided Cold Rolling Unit at village Vasind, Bombay has already been commissioned and the production from the same has commenced. Keeping in view the favourable markets and other conditions, we aim at achieving the sales target of around Rs.70.00 crores during the ensuing year 30th June, 1984.

I must express my gratitude towards the State Government, the Hon'ble Chief Minister, Shri Bhajan Lalji and the Local Administration for their timely help and patronising us whenever we approached them. The Hon'ble Chief Minister, gave me much encouragement to develop our product.....which is an import substitution.....so as to help save the much needed foreign exchange.

DIVIDEND

The Directors are pleased to recommend a dividend of 15% in line with the previous year. The proposed dividend will absorb Rs.12.02 lacs and a sum of Rs.62 lacs and Rs.44.70 lacs have been transferred to Investment Allowance Reserve and General Reserve Respectively.

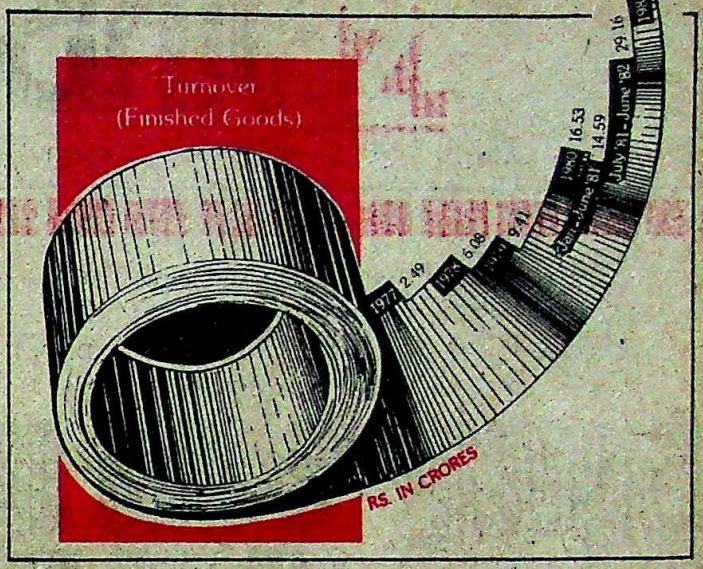
SHARE CAPITAL :

During the year under review the Company had issued fully paid-up Equity Shares as Bonus Shares in the proportion of one Bonus Share for each fully paid-up Equity Share of the Company held at the close of business as at 15th October, 1982 and thus, the share capital of the Company was increased to Rs.60.10 lacs.

Further the Company has since issued 2,00,000 Equity shares of Rs.10/- each at a premium of Rs.5/- per share with the permission of the Controller of Capital issues. After this issue of shares at a premium the Share capital of the Company is now increased to Rs.80.10 lacs besides a credit balance of Rs.10 lacs in the Share Premium Account.

I express my appreciation and gratefulness to the New Bank of India, Vijaya Bank, Industrial Development Bank of India, Industrial Credit and Investment Corpn. of India Ltd., State Industrial Corpn. of Maharashtra, Maharashtra Industrial Development Corpn., Haryana State Industrial Dev. Corpn. and Haryana Financial Corporation for extending their fullest co-operation.

I am sincerely thankful to the Reserve Bank of India who has accorded approval for enhancing the Cash Credit Limits to Rs.8 crores under Credit Authorisation Scheme which has been arranged with the New Bank of India and Vijaya Bank in consortium.



I have all along been maintaining and it is my confirmed view today also, that to have a sound and durable industrial environment there should be a close rapport between the management and the workers. There should be no communication gap and that if the workers are listened to, their genuine grievances are solved and raw good floor workers are given opportunities to be promoted as mistries etc. there will not be any industrial unrest. On the contrary they will be more loyal and a family atmosphere would be created. In this atmosphere the outside professional elements and leaders would fail to exploit the innocent workers for their own selfish ends. I am very proud of my workers and express my sincere thanks to them for discharging their duties honestly and diligently not only in their factory duty but also in games and extra curricular activities.

My thanks are also due to the Selling Agents, who have rendered valuable services in maintaining the tempo of promoting the sales of the company's products in different markets in India.

I also put on record my gratitude and appreciation of my colleagues on the Board of Directors for their fullest co-operation and healthy suggestions, keeping in view of the changing times and also to all ranks of the staff for the utmost, untiring, dedicated, loyal and sincere services, rendered by them towards the up-liftment of your Company.

JAI HIND

	Improvements over corresponding 12 Months	Year Ended 30th June, 1983.	Period (18 Months) Ended 30th June, 1982.
FINANCIAL RESULTS		**Rs. IN LACS.**	
Turnover	+ 41.80%	4135.00	4375.00
Gross Profit	+ 8.02%	310.86	431.67
Interest and Bank Charges	—	97.19	121.08
Administration & Other Selling Expenses	—	62.03	114.71
Net Profit	+ 16.12%	151.64	195.88
Donation paid to Rural Development Trust	—	23.50	50.00
Profit before tax.	+ 31.76%	128.14	145.88

NOTE : THIS DOES NOT PURPORT TO BE A REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

JINDAL ORGANISATION

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WEST BENGAL

Disturbing the Peace



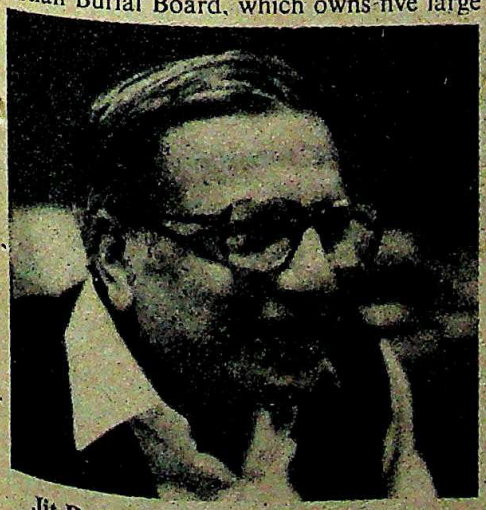
AWAY from the roar of traffic on Calcutta's Park Street, and southward down the quieter Rawdon Street which leads to the city's old 'European quarters', there is a 3-acre cemetery, closed since 1902 and heavily walled on all sides, where time stands still. But it is doubtful if it will continue to do so. Buyers have already made a bid for South Park Street (SPS) burial ground in the city's prime district and if the Christian Burial Board, which owns most cemeteries in Calcutta, buckles under pressure at its meeting next month, the first slice will change hands.

But a lot of Calcutta's, and India's, history is at stake in the deal which is being pursued, among others, by Apeejay Trust, the family trust of non-resident tycoon Swraj Paul and his three India-based brothers—Stya, Jit and Surrendra. All the four brothers and their children are members of the trust. When the wreckers go to work, they will destroy 500-odd relics of British empire-builders in the 18th and the 19th centuries. They will also obliterate the tombs of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1808-1831), Eurasian poet, teacher and architect of the Young Bengal movement which spawned a national consciousness and Sir William Jones (1746-1794), a Supreme Court judge who founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784, gave shape and form to Indology as a separate discipline and paved the ground for the emergence, a few decades later, of an oriental scholar of the stature of P. Max Mueller.

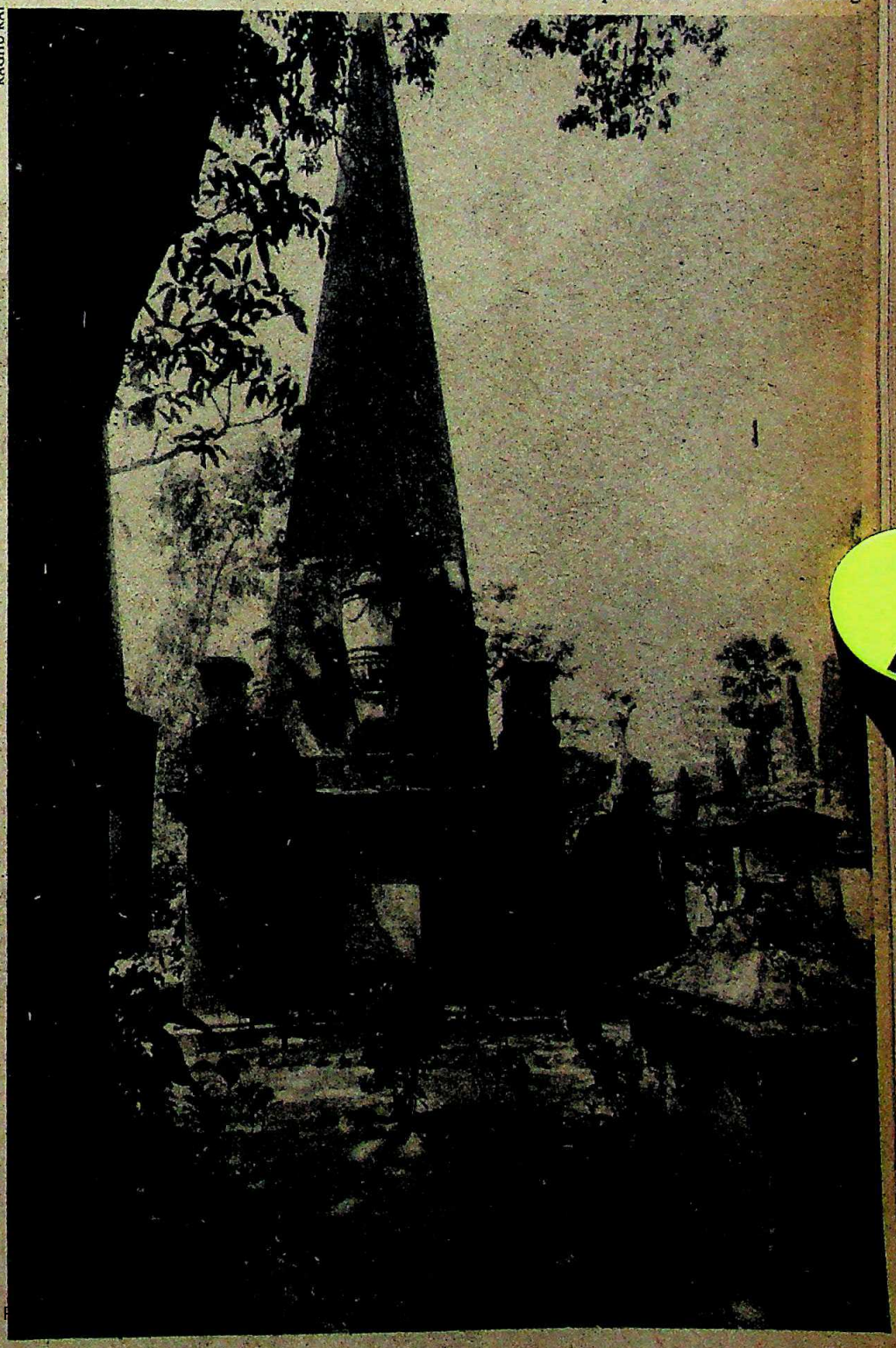
In a letter written on January 19, Apeejay Trust put up a proposal before the Christian Burial Board, which owns five large cemeteries in Calcutta by a 1881 statute, to buy a 100-ft piece of the South Park Street burial ground for the professed purpose of "setting up a permanent art gallery in Calcutta" for contemporary artists. Apeejay did not specify the depth but mentioned that it needed the land "along Rawdon Street". The Derozio tomb is a bare 15 ft from the Rawdon Street edge, and Jones' tomb some 40 ft away. Putting up a structure at the Rawdon Street end will mean sacrificing both tombs.

This is not the first time that Apeejay has bid for cemetery land. In 1973, the board leased out to it the half-acre French cemetery smack opposite the SPS cemetery. The eight-storey building erected by Apeejay Trust now houses Apeejay School on two of its floors. Three other floors are rented out and the trust has plans to build further and put more floor space on rent. Says Jit Paul, 62, the family's fighting arm when it comes to real estate operations: "We are taking

RAGHU RAI



Jit Paul and (right) the tomb of William Jones: a threat to history



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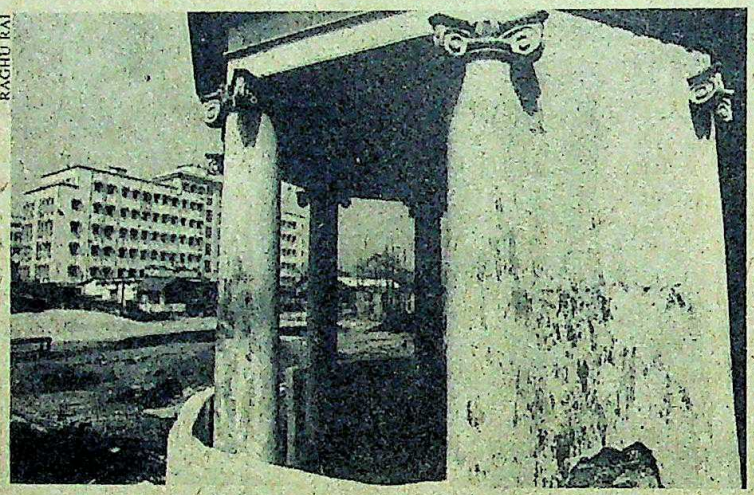
cemetery land on lease for social causes—schools, art gallery, and so on. If the buildings generate revenue on their own, social work can go on unimpeded."

The French cemetery contained the tombs of nearly a hundred Jesuit preachers, French employees of the landlords in Calcutta and traders operating from Calcutta during the East India Company's rule. The relics have been levelled by bulldozers while the carved headstones, local residents remember, sold for Rs 20 apiece. Made of Italian marble, some of these could have fetched Rs 10,000 each at today's prices, according to the estimates of Calcutta police who registered many cases of graveyard vandalism.

Next to the French cemetery was the half-acre North Park Street (NPS) burial ground, leased out also in 1973 to Assembly of God Church at a ridiculously low price of a Rs 3-lakh lump sum payment and Rs 3,500 a month in rent. Even in 1973, say real estate agents, the property would have yielded an annual rent of Rs 6 lakh. The church set up a hospital there and has now put up a board saying that it intends to erect a 10-storey commercial building on the land. With property prices at Rs 550 a sq ft in the Park Street area, the building can raise a revenue of Rs 2.75 crore, or a rent of Rs 2 lakh a month. "We need the money to support the hospital," said Ronald Shaw, a spokesman of the church, mouthing the same argument that Paul advances. However, at the time of the razing of the tombs, at NPS cemetery, nobody noticed that they included the grave of Nathaniel Brassey Halhed (1751-1830), whose *A Grammar of the Bengal Language* (1778) was the first book to be printed in Bengal using movable types in the Bengali script.

The Christian Burial Board was more than willing to dispose of the two other closed cemeteries on Park Street, as is evident from the terms on which the Assembly of God Church obtained the lease rights. However, parcelling out the SPS cemetery may not be easy because the West Bengal Government, by a notification in 1981 under the West Bengal Preservation of Historical Monuments and Objects and Excavation of Historical Sites Act, 1957, declared the cemetery protected. Though its leasing or sale is banned under law, the state Government bears no financial responsibility for its maintenance. The board, in collaboration with the Association for Preservation of Historical Cemeteries, maintains the cemetery.

Many real estate operators in Calcutta feel that the legal snags involved in leasing out a part of the SPS cemetery to the Apeejay group may not be insurmountable, "provided the two parties are willing". As A.D. Khan, 80, a retired Christian member of the Indian Civil Service, who is the chairman of the board as well as president of the association, and during whose tenure the two other closed cemeteries had changed hands, explained: "The state Government may have to denotify the cemetery if we declare that it is beyond our means to maintain the SPS cemetery." Khan said he was "not unwilling" to lease it out "provided law permits".



RAGHU RAI

A modern building intrudes upon a mausoleum on North Park Street

HOWEVER, the Asiatic Society, the creation of Jones which celebrated its bi-centenary in January with Mrs Gandhi as the chief guest, is determined to stall the move. In a letter to Sheila Kaul, the Union minister of state for education, Chandan Roy Chowdhury, general secretary of the society, wanted the Centre to intervene and take responsibility for the cemetery. "We cannot allow the real estate sharks to fool around with a chunk of Indian history," said Roy Chowdhury. The society will soon begin to catalogue the tombs on the basis of old cemetery records, and an extinct nineteenth century publication, *Bengal Obituary*—only a single copy is known to be available in its collection of rare books and manuscripts.

Besides the three closed cemeteries, the Christian Burial Board owns three open cemeteries, including the 33-acre cemetery on Acharya Jagadish Bose Road which shelters the tomb of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the greatest of the 19th century Bengali poets. There are half-a-dozen private cemeteries too, including the closed and historic St John's Church, consecrated in 1787 "at a function attended by Earl Cornwallis, the Governor-General of India".

The graveyard attached to the church is older by a century and houses the mausoleum of Job Charnock, founder of the British settlement in Calcutta, who died in 1692.

The cemetery also contains the tombs of Ralph Sheldon, brother of Gilbert Sheldon, archbishop of Canterbury; Dr William Hamilton, surgeon of the East India Company, who cured Mughal emperor Farrukh-siyar of an ailment—in exchange, the company was given the right to build a factory in Calcutta; and Thomas Fanshaw Middleton, the first bishop of India. Though St John's Church too is protected under the Preservation of Historical Monuments Act, as many as three property developers have made bids for the burial ground. Neither the church nor the intending lessees are willing to go on record, but some say they are watching "the course that Apeejay's petition takes".

Jit Paul says his proposal is "not actuated by profit motive" and is "an extension of our concern for this city and its people". To demonstrate his recently-acquired taste for art, he recently held an open-air art festival at a tiny fountain-spot in front of the Apeejay group's flagship Park Hotel. The exhibition was timed with the All India Congress Committee(I) session in the city. However, his proposal for the 48-year lease right of SPS cemetery also includes a clause to enable him to use it commercially to make the art gallery project self-supporting.

"That may be the thin end of the wedge," says a rival property buyer of Park Street who claims to have intimately studied Pauls' operation. Their Apeejay group, in the names of various subsidiary companies, now owns a restaurant chain on Park Street and three large buildings in the locality. It made bids for at least seven prized properties in the area; and is most feared in the property market for its swift, ruthless operations.

The Pauls have both the money and the connections to grab the cemeteries. Chandan Basu, son of West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu uses an Apeejay flat in Queen's Mansion, also on Park Street, as 'bakery consultant' to Flury's, a subsidiary. Union Railway Minister A.B.A. Ghani Khan Choudhury is a tenant in one of their buildings on Alipore Road. Another tenant is D.P. Chattopadhyay, former Union commerce minister, at Park Mansion.

"We'll examine the proposal for lease transfer when it comes to us," observed with perceptible resignation a spokesman of the Department of Land Revenue. Just now, the hallowed inscriptions on the sleeping tombs couldn't be more at odds with reality—Rest in Peace.

—SUMIT MITRA in Calcutta

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WEST BENGAL

A House in Disorder



WEST Bengal Congress(I) leader Subrata Mukherjee is known for his ability to create trouble. But last fortnight he surpassed all previous performances when, on being suspended from the house for the rest of the budget session, he scaled the walls the next day to make a forcible entry into the house followed by other Congress(I) legislators and then got involved in a free for all with Marxist MLA's. The Speaker Hashim Abdul Halim hurriedly adjourned the house, interrupting Finance Minister Ashok Mitra in the middle of his budget speech, which was taken as read.

The ensuing brawl saw 24 microphones completely shattered. But the damage to property was totally insignificant compared to the damage done to the dignity of the house. As legislators continued to fight and jostle, the speaker who had withdrawn from the house lamented: "Disgrace upon disgrace has been mounted on the house."

A few hours before storming the Assembly, the Congressmen had a prolonged session with Governor A.P. Sharma at Raj Bhavan at the end of which Mukherjee said: "We had gone to Sharma to protest against the lathi charge on us in the house yesterday." According to them the governor gave them "a patient hearing and had promised to inform the President and prime minister of what has been going on here".

Though an earlier agitation against the Left Front had to be called off at the instance of the party high command, this time Mukherjee and others like Suniti Chattoraj say they "will not rest unless the Centre takes note of our plight here and resorts to some action". The lathi charge inside the house, the first in the state's recent history, had been ordered by the speaker to remove Mukherjee and seven other Congress(I) MLA's who, suspended by him for obstructing proceedings had refused to budge, squatted inside singing songs and raising slogans for nearly 10 hours till close to midnight.

The suspension order had come when, not satisfied with Chief Minister Jyoti Basu's answer to a question on a village incident that had taken place some months ago, the Congress legislators kept on shouting and abusing him; among other things Basu was called an "antisocial element".

The next day was budget day and the speaker had issued instructions that the eight suspended legislators would not be allowed entry into the house. As the Congressmen came in procession from Raj Bhavan they were told of this. In protest joined by other party men, all of them squatted on the road outside. The squatting continued for about an hour during which budget papers smuggled from inside were burnt and slogans like "down with Marxist goondas" raised.

Suddenly unnoticed by the security staff Mukherjee managed to scale the wall and run towards the house. This was a signal for the others to force open the gate and rush inside. By the time the security men could get to them they had already made it inside the house where the free for all followed in which two Congress(I) MLA's Zainal Abedin and Ambika Banerjee were visibly hurt.

Mukherjee himself was neither hurt nor ruffled. For, a little while after the incident he sat relaxed in the Congress(I) legislature party chamber and proudly pointed out: "I had told the speaker yesterday that nobody was powerful enough to stop my entry into the house and I have proved it." That he certainly has done, much to the chagrin of the speaker and the chief minister, who immediately demanded explanations from policemen and assembly security staff.

Observing the apparent inaction of the police, Marxist ministers and members once again complained that a section of the force was "acting as agents of the Congress". They were echoing Jyoti Basu's feelings expressed on earlier occasions, particularly in January this year, when Congress(I) volunteers had paralysed the entire city to protest the arrest of three of their leaders who had organised the violent demonstration against Farooq Abdullah at Calcutta airport. Then, too, the police were nowhere to be seen.

Though last fortnight they were present in strength outside the Assembly they apparently failed to notice Mukherjee scaling the wall even though he was cheered on by a section of the crowd that had collected—as always in Calcutta—to watch the tamasha. A police officer had a somewhat ridiculous explanation: "We had been asked to man the gate and that is what we were doing. How could we know that walls would be scaled?"

Apart from outdoing the security staff, the Congress(I) members had the added satisfaction of having provoked the Left Front to take physical action against them. While the speaker sought to justify the lathi charge by saying that he had "no other option as parliamentary democracy was being scuttled", the fact that they had been beaten up could well evoke a large degree of sympathy for state Congressmen from the high command.

As one of them said: "This will certainly lead to an intensification of the Left Front's confrontation with the Centre and this is what we want as now this is to our advantage." For the Left Front, stormy days, both inside the legislature and outside, appeared very much on the cards.

—SUMANTA SEN



BIKASH DAS

Mukherjee fighting with security staff: provocative action



BIKASH DAS

Congress(I) MLAs burning budget papers: free for all

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MAHARASHTRA

Patils under Pressure

THE ERUPTION had been heralded for many months, for even by the standards of the fragmented Congress(I) in Maharashtra, the rumblings have been unusually loud. As the long standing hostility between former chief minister Abdul Rehman Antulay and Maharashtra's odd couple, Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil and his wife Shalinitai Patil, exploded last fortnight it was clear that the point of no return had been reached between the two warring factions.

The issue was Antulay himself: brazen and flamboyant as ever, fighting a rearguard battle to protect himself from prosecution for his notorious fund collection as chief minister. With his cases coming up for hearing in the high court this fortnight after 30 months of stalling, Antulay through his legislator supporters made it plain to both the high command in Delhi and his chief minister that if no attempt was made to bail him out he could make things highly embarrassing both for his party and Vasantdada.

The pulls and pressures at work was evident in an embarrassing volte face by the party on March 12. On his return from Delhi a chastened Patil ate humble pie by announcing at a Congress(I) legislature party meeting that the Congress(I) would be officially sponsoring the amendment this session. Support for the proposed amendment, which will open a Pandora's box, holding that an MLA is

BHAWAN SINGH



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a public servant beyond the reach of prosecution without the sanction of the legislature, was prompted perhaps by fears that the Rajya Sabha elections might be sabotaged later this month. While the state is allowed to legislate on criminal law the amendment would undoubtedly be challenged in court, besides knocking the Congress(I)'s bonafides for maintaining public morality.

Indignation in Parliament and the press obviously induced second thoughts. In a late-night drama Patil flew back to Delhi and AICC(I) General Secretary Rajiv Gandhi, at an unscheduled press conference announced that the party was not supporting the amendment. The mix-up in the party's stand was due to a communication gap between Patil and the high command, he said.

Antulay's battle to ensure that he receives protection from the Centre in his legal troubles has been many-pronged. In inimitable style, he first got two of his supporters and minor party functionaries, Shantaram Brid and Diwakar Dalvi to apply for sanction from Governor Idris H. Latif to prosecute Patil and his wife under the Prevention of Corruption Act—ironically, the same act under which Antulay himself is being arraigned.

Continuing his pressure tactics, he announced candidly: "If I am guilty, others are equally guilty." Antulay points out that the trust deed for the Indira Gandhi Pratibha Pratishthan was drafted by Ramrao Adik and Rafiq Zakaria, leader of the Congress(I) in the Rajya Sabha. Both were trustees. The Patils as office-bearers of certain sugar cooperatives had donated generously and they were surely "duty-bound to find out if the trust was a private one before playing with the poor farmer's money". BJP Vice-President Ram Jethmalani, senior counsel for Antulay's prosecution, reads into Antulay's remarks an attempt to blackmail witnesses including the prime minister, who is one of 130 witnesses listed by the prosecution. There is a dispute about whether she gave her consent to allowing her name to be used by the trust.

For Patil, Antulay's latest campaign is the climax to a shaky 13-month tenure in



"If the role of Solomon is given to Mrs Gandhi and the state Congress(I) is considered the baby and Dada and I the two claimants, I as the real mother will not allow the baby to be cut in half at any price. But Dada will not mind. He will ask for one piece."

—Abdul Rehman Antulay

"Delhi has never stopped me from doing what I have wanted. The dissidents want to create trouble but Delhi has never asked me nor expressed concern. If Mrs Gandhi isn't taking disciplinary action against dissidents she must have her reasons. I have never told her to stop them."

—Vasantdada Patil



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Shalinitai and Vasantdada and (right) arch-rival Antulay: point of no return

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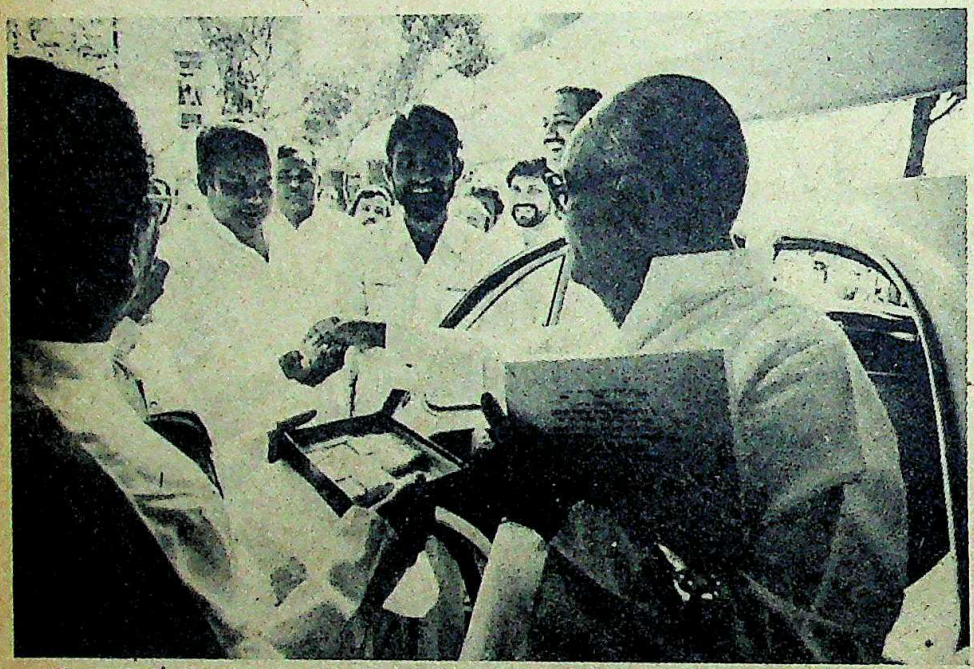
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office in which he has spent most of his energies keeping his detractors in his own party at bay. The odds are against him in his battle for retaining the chief minister's gaddi for long: a high command which views him with suspicion thanks to his past disloyalty, a majority of his party MLA's antagonistic since he is termed an "outsider", rejoining the party only shortly before the 1980 Lok Sabha election and a host of rivals waiting in the wings.

There is Deputy Chief Minister Ramrao Adik, who actually commands more support within the Cabinet than the chief minister. The unreliable Adik has during the last year been shuttling between Patil's camp and that of his detractors, occasionally hitting out at Patil, most recently when he remarked that "those who lean on walking sticks should make way for the younger generation," a dig at Patil's 67 years and infirmities.

There is the rigid, schoolmasterish S.B. Chavan, planning minister at the Centre, who has never forgiven Patil for toppling him from the chief ministership in 1977. Two months ago Chavan in a speech criticised the state Government for failing to implement the 20-point programme effectively. Finally there is the arrogant and autocratic Antulay who was forced to resign as chief minister in 1981 following his fund-raising scandal being taken note of by the court, and has never been reconciled to his fall from grace.

All three men are inimical to each other, united only in their desire to dislodge Patil. A host of second rank leaders from Vidarbha, Marathwada, western Maharashtra and Konkan—such as Baburao Kale, N.K. Tirpude, N.M. Tidke—often join in the conspiracies against Patil. State party President, mild mannered N.M. Kamble, far from controlling his flock, at times joins in the campaign of running down the chief minister as does Patil's predecessor Babasaheb Bhosale. Little wonder that Patil was moved to observe ruefully last month: "The Congress(I) in the state is a house on fire; it will need a little time to put out the flames." To which Bhosale, always ready with a wise-crack, commented: "If all of us are his enemies, who are his friends? I am very worried." Patil's woes are further compounded by his wife, the glamorous Shalinitai, MP, who some feel is in fact Patil's worst enemy, since her questionable activities and high-flying ambitions make him very vulnerable (see following story). Patil's response to Brid and Dalvi's complaint is: "My hands are clean. Let the law take its course." Not many are willing to concede the same about his wife.



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Vasantdada distributes sweets to leading dissident Bhaurao Patil; surrounded by foes

ANTULAY first mounted his campaign by manipulating an impressive show of support from MLA's. According to Antulay's frontman MLA Bhaurao Patil around 150 legislators out of a total of some 275 had been persuaded to sign a memorandum to the prime minister calling for an amendment to the PCA.

The signature campaign was not just a show of support for Antulay. The organisers had whipped up fears that the Supreme Court's interpretation of the law could be a threat to all of them and they should fight to save their own necks. Said Antulay: "This will open the floodgates for the harassment of legislators." The campaign organisers pointed out that as the law stands interpreted, an MLA serving on a public body can be hauled up for accepting a gift of more than Rs 50. Confided a signatory: "There is considerable feeling out here that if we don't all hang together we can all hang separately."

The high command's attitudes towards the warring groups in the state has all along been ambiguous. Mrs Gandhi has never got over her mistrust of Patil who deserted the party in 1978 and, besides, is one of the last of the old style Congress leaders who has an independent power base thanks to control of a well established system of sugar and banking cooperatives in western Maharashtra. Her suspicions were strengthened by loyalist claims that at a pinch Patil could abandon ship and team up with Y.B. Chavan, his one-time mentor and Congress(S) leader Sharad Pawar in a Maratha triumvirate.

The constant endeavour of the party has been to keep Patil in the fold but ensure that he does not become too independent. Patil, though chief minister, has been snubbed repeatedly as in the composition of the Maharashtra executive, the selection of the state party president and New Delhi's willingness to entertain the dissidents on their frequent trips to Delhi to complain against him.

The high command would not like to antagonise Antulay too far. Even Patil acknowledges that Antulay holds sway over considerable numbers of Muslim voters in the state and accuses him of using his clout with the Muslims to sabotage his wife's election to the Lok Sabha in Sangli last year. Besides, Antulay makes clear that he has sizeable mischief potential and if driven to the wall may not go down alone. He cites the biblical tale of the justice of Solomon to show his party loyalty: "If the role of Solomon is given to Mrs Gandhi and the state Congress(I) is considered the baby and Dada (Patil) and I the two claimants, I as the real mother will not allow the baby to be cut in half at any price. But Dada will not mind. He will ask for one piece." But his deeds speak otherwise.

Brid and Dalvi, in their complaint, sought to rope in the Patils in the very misdeeds that Antulay is being tried for. They alleged that the Patils together had in 1981 collected Rs 1.82 crore illegally for Antulay's Indira Gandhi Pratibha Pratishthan with the sole intention of coercing the then chief minister to give out of turn permission for favours such as increased quotas for country liquor to the sugar cooperatives which they control. They alleged that Shalinitai, then revenue minister, could not have been unaware that the pratishthan was a private trust and not the public institution that Antulay was trumpeting it as at that time.

For good measure Dalvi also threw in the specific charge against Shalinitai, that as revenue minister she allowed the National Centre for Performing Arts, a Tata-funded

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VASANTDADA PATIL

"Troublemakers will talk"

AT 67, Maharashtra Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil is just five days older than the prime minister even if there seems a decade of difference because of his varied ailments. But despite the insulin injection, walking stick and pills, Patil's hectic schedule would put many a younger man to shame. At the chief minister's spacious old-fashioned villa Varsha, surrounded by the skyscrapers of Malabar Hill, there is always a throng of visitors and favour seekers and Patil somehow manages to see most of them even if only for a few seconds.

In an interview with INDIA TODAY's *Principal Correspondent* COOMI KAPOOR, *Patil spoke with remarkable candour:*

Q. ***Are you satisfied with your government's performance during its one year in office?***

A. I agree there is no complete satisfaction. That comes only when all one's dreams are translated into action.

Q. ***Maharashtra today is said to be administratively unstable and the civil service demoralised.***

A. That is incorrect. Some people are deliberately trying to create instability by spreading such rumours. You must consider the administration in terms of the position when I took over. For one year previously no government machinery was working, no decisions taken. I took over and immediately mobilised the administration so that water supply was brought to some 18,000 to 20,000 drought-affected villages.

Q. ***Aren't your hands rather tied because of dissidence within your own party?***

A. It is true that some people are trying to create an atmosphere of instability where none exists. They have a conspiracy, with one person making a speech in one place and another somewhere else so that madam will take notice. The people who want to make trouble, only they talk. They give money to the press. Let them do what they want; it is not affecting me.

Q. ***Hasn't the high command been less than fair to Maharashtra? Isn't the state being ruled by Delhi?***

A. Delhi has never stopped me from doing what I have wanted. The dissidents want to create trouble but Delhi has never asked me nor expressed concern. If Mrs Gandhi isn't taking disciplinary action against dissidents she must have her reasons. I have never told her to stop them.

I don't go much to Delhi, just once in one or two months or when I have a meeting. I don't always call 1 Safdarjung Road and I don't take much time of madam's either when I meet her. When I don't meet her they say she didn't give him the time and when I meet her they say he has no other work to do.

Q. ***Lately you have started attacking your critics within the party openly which is not in keeping with your normal pragmatic soft-spoken image.***

A. You are 100 per cent correct. I kept quiet as long as I could bear it but then they started repeating their canards every day. Then people started thinking there must be some truth in it. So I had to on occasion make it clear that it was untrue.

Q. ***Surely Antulay does not control the Muslim vote in the whole of the state, so as to be capable of sabotaging Shalinitai's election in Sangli.***

A. Perhaps it can be that Muslims were helped by him in a big way and I cannot oblige them in this way. People say that Antulay has given much money to build mosques in the whole of the state.

Q. ***It is said that Shalinitai functions as an extra-constitutional authority from the ministerial B-4 premises allotted in your name.***

A. If people come to visit her who can stop them? I can't tell them not to meet her if they want to. It is incorrect that she is giving orders. I have not told anyone to meet her.

Q. ***Who will be your successor as chief minister?***

A. Whoever the party elects.

Q. ***Could Shalinitai be your successor?***

A. This cannot be so. Don't speak of it. Don't even mention it. There will be a quarrel.

Q. ***But is she likely to stake her claim?***

A. Whoever is elected will stake a claim. And it is everyone's right. How can I tell her in advance not to? I don't think I would help her.

Q. ***But it is her ambition to be chief minister.***

A. It is the ambition of everyone including those who are making so much noise at present.

Q. ***You have been quoted as saying that you will not stand for the next election.***

A. This type of talk goes on. How can I say beforehand? The high command will decide. I have not taken any decision so far. If the high command says my presence is necessary then I will fight.

Q. ***Weren't you a member of the RSS in your teens?***

A. That is true. I was in the RSS for two or three years when I left school in 1935. It was a mistake of childhood. I quit the organisation by 1937 when I joined the Congress. Since then I have never gone near them. I have never even thought about it.



BHAWAN SINGH

"Some people are trying to create an atmosphere of instability where none exists...let them do what they want. It is not affecting me."

"The high command will decide. I have not taken any decision so far. If the high command says my presence is necessary then I will fight."

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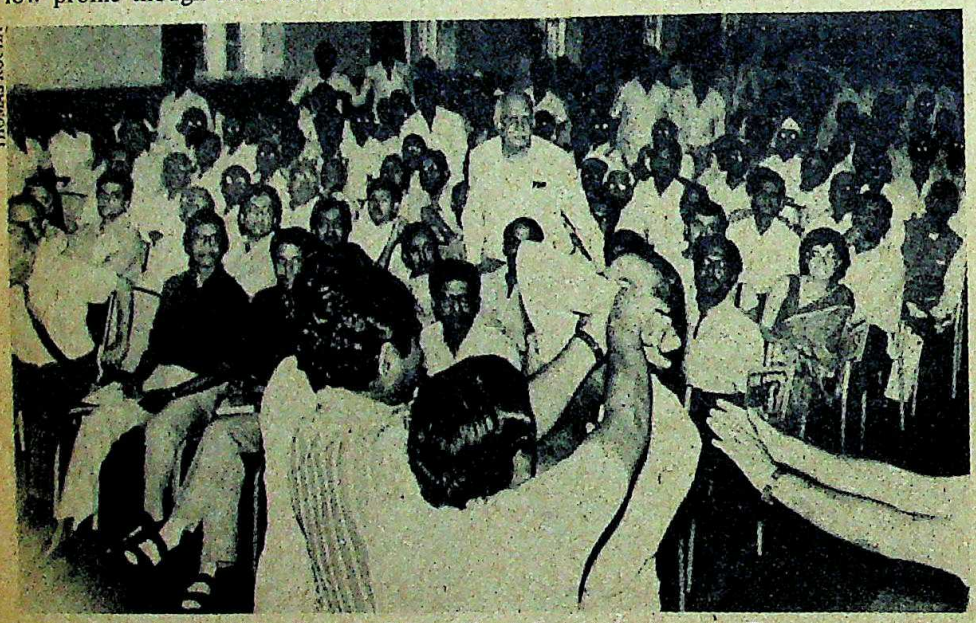
trust, permission to construct a hotel on land allotted for charitable and cultural purposes. Interestingly, one of the charges that Antulay must answer is similar: permitting land donated for charitable purposes to be used as a commercial project in return for donations to his pratishthan.

Patil's followers led by Murarrao Rane and T. Patil, launched an abortive counter signature campaign of ordinary citizens against any move to amend the PCA. For a day a tent was pitched at Bombay's Flora Fountain, the city's commercial hub and pedestrians were urged to sign. Bapurao Bhapse, a loyalist close to Ramrao Adik, threatened to quit the party "if people like Antulay are to be saved by ordinances and amendments". Adik himself maintained a low profile though his brother Gobindrao

Citizens' outrage at Antulay's confrontationist attitude towards the judiciary was reflected in a well-attended meeting organised by the Lawyers for Democracy last month. A group of Antulay supporters were arrested for attempting to disrupt the meeting, but not before they had distributed a circular to the audience. Curiously one line of the circular actually pleaded for the right to a delayed trial: "If the laws of this country permit legislators to be prosecuted as the Supreme Court has now declared, then the same set of laws should have given the legislators the benefit of all the delays."

Eminent constitutional expert H.M. Seervai was taken aback by this line of reasoning. "Rationally speaking, no person would prefer to be tried by a district judge rather than a high court judge," he observed

THOMAS ROCHA



Antulay supporters being prevented from disrupting the Lawyers for Democracy meeting

has signed the pro-amendment appeal.

While the warring groups battled over the issue basically on partisan grounds, a lot of concerned citizens were upset by the proposed amendment's implication that any citizen should be above the law, Antulay's defiant attitude towards the Supreme Court has added to the indignation. In a hard hitting interview to INDIA TODAY (*see box*) he accused the Supreme Court of acting as if it was above the law.

Deciding to argue his case himself in the Supreme Court Antulay told special judge Khatri last week: "You cannot try me. You have no authority to do so. Only a special judge can do so." He claimed the Supreme Court judgement has "descended to obscenity" in his case and when Jethmalani as opposing counsel objected, Antulay merely repeated the expression justifying himself by remarking that the court had many a time used the phrase "fraud on the Constitution".

caustically. In fact in his Supreme Court judgement last month D.A. Desai, struck by the delays in litigation in the Antulay cases thanks to the number of appeals to various courts, observed: "After two and a half years the cases have not moved an inch."

Since 1981 former BJP and Janata MLA's Ramdas Nayak and P.B. Samant have been pursuing Antulay in a strong effort to book him for a variety of offences ranging from misuse of office to extortion and cheating under the PCA.

Whatever Antulay's eventual fate, Patil's position in the party remains uncertain. Installed as chief minister in February last year after the shock defeats in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka when the high command felt an established name was required to stem the rot which had set in under the arrogant and arbitrary Antulay and the ineffective Bhosale, Patil has not lived up to expectations.

HIS FINEST hour was at the start of his tenure when he mobilised government machinery to provide water supply to over 15,000 villages. But he has failed to rise to the occasion since, notably in the handling of the textile workers' strike in Bombay, dealing with the Mandal Committee report recommending reservations for backward classes, opening a dozen new engineering colleges without establishing proper academic criteria and the Uran farmers' land price agitation which was handled with such brutality that his own party members protested.

The result of all this is that the front-ranking but rudderless state, once a bastion of the Congress(I), is in danger of slipping out of the hands of the ruling party. Congress(S) leader Sharad Pawar, as he barnstorms the state in a pre-election campaign similar in style to N.T. Rama Rao's is getting much mileage out of his accusation that the land of Shivaji is being ruled from Delhi. Says Uttamrao Patil, president of the state BJP: "The Patil Government is directionless and weak-kneed." Pawar comes out less strongly perhaps because he is mischievously anxious to add fodder to the rumour that Patil could join him: "Patil must be credited at least for good intentions. But what can he do? His hands are tied by Delhi."

Patil angrily refutes any such suggestion, pointing out that Pawar, though at one time his protégé, is the man who brought his ministry down in 1978. After the 1978 assembly elections when neither Janata, Congress(S) nor Congress(I) got a clear majority, Patil as head of the Congress(S) was installed as chief minister in coalition with the Congress(I), but Pawar overnight deserted him and took along a number of Congress(S) MLA's to become chief minister of the PDF government supported by the Janata.

Such back-slapping-back-stabbing relations are not unfamiliar in Maratha politics. Patil himself originally gained prominence in the '60s as the blue-eyed boy of the then Maratha strongman and chief minister Y.B. Chavan. Later his wife would attack Chavan stridently and contest against him in the 19[illegible] parliamentary elections. The son of a small-time Sangli farmer who actively participated in the freedom movement, Patil has an impressive record. Shot while escaping from jail, he narrowly escaped a trial for treason against the Crown.

In the post-Independence Congress he was among the pioneers of Maharashtra's well-entrenched cooperative movement. Even Patil's opponents admit that he is responsible for much of the development in his native district of Sangli. There he is something of a demi-god—his photographs adorn most restaurants and hotels in the area.

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A.R. ANTULAY

"The judiciary is no deity"

TWO YEARS out of office, felled by an adverse court judgement, Abdul Rehman Antulay remains ebullient and unrepentant. An unending, steady stream of visitors into his Marine Drive home shows how many people still see him as a power to reckon with. One visitor he does not usually see these days except on his own terms is a magazine interviewer. And his condition is simple: the magazine concerned must put him on its cover page. With a touch of bravado, he told Principal Correspondent COOMI KAPOOR: *"I am hot news. I have exclusive material and with my face on the cover, your sales will increase by 50 per cent."*

In fact, three Bombay-based magazines have accepted his condition, but because INDIA TODAY*'s cover is not bookable, the request was naturally not entertained.*

Antulay nevertheless agreed to speak on the judgement, on Patil and Ram Jethmalani. Excerpts:

Q. *Does the move to amend the Prevention of Corruption Act (*PCA*) retrospectively imply that your followers consider you above the law?*

A. Nobody is above the law, including the Supreme Court itself, nor is anyone in a democracy entitled to throw the law to the winds. The Supreme Court has superseded the law itself and 'legislated' its own wish in the garb of a judicial directive. Under the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1952 it is the state Government alone which can specify a special judge. This is the first patent illegality committed by the Supreme Court itself.

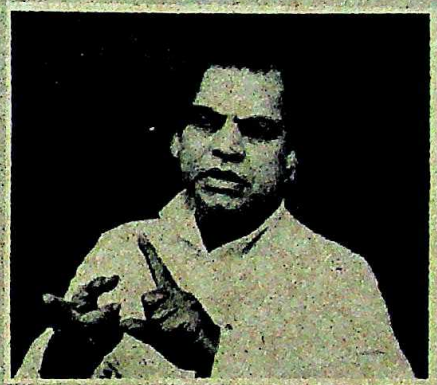
Again whereas Section 406 of the CrPC does not authorise the Supreme Court to transfer a case from one criminal court subordinate to a high court to the high court itself, the Supreme Court in my case has done precisely that.

The third illegality is while throwing the relevant provisions of the law to the winds the Supreme Court has asked in the cloak of a judicial directive, the chief justice of the Bombay High Court to nominate one of the judges as a special judge. No such authority vests in the Supreme Court, nor in the high court, much less a chief justice of a high court.

To do all this, Article 21 of the Constitution is invoked, which makes a mockery of that article. These illegal acts at the hands of the Supreme Court itself are the very negation of the rule of law. In view of all these illegalities and unconstitutionalities committed by the Supreme Court do you still maintain the Supreme Court cannot bend a clear and unambiguous law to accommodate its own particular wish in a particular case against a particular individual! That is why I said at the beginning that in a democracy no one is above the law, not even the Supreme Court.

I have only enunciated the legal position as a student of law and therefore it is fully covered under the concept of fair comment. It cannot be called denigration of the judiciary. The judiciary, I am afraid, is no deity to be worshipped without question.

Q. *Some feel your objections to the Supreme Court order which ensures a speedy trial indicates your nervousness and feeling of guilt. Normally one should welcome cutting down on delays.*



"The Supreme Court has superseded the law and 'legislated' its own wish in the garb of a judicial directive."

A. After pointing out all the illegalities and unconstitutionalities, if an objection still persists that I am saying or doing something out of fright of facing a trial then I can only say, God give them wisdom. There is a remedy for every malady except malice.

Q. *Do you support the* MLA*'s petition asking for the amendment of the* PCA *retrospectively?*

A. It is the constitutional right of the legislature to amend the law. If the Supreme Court can give a blatantly illegal judgement as one of the limbs of the state, how can a legislature be prevented from discharging its legitimate constitutional functions?

Q. *But are you signing the petition for amending the* PCA*?*

A. No, I am not signing.

Q. *Vasantdada has said that people say you gained Muslim support by giving money to Muslims for building mosques?*

A. If Dada thinks I am as communal as he is himself, it is unfortunate for the Congress(I). I call upon him to institute an inquiry by any judge and see if he can substantiate his charges in even one taluk of his choice. Let him mention even two mosques for which I arranged monetary help, either directly or indirectly. On the other hand, I can give at least two illustrations among many in which I raised monetary assistance for a Hindu and a neo-Buddhist temple. I am proud to be a Muslim but I have never claimed to be a Muslim leader. I do not believe in exploiting religion. It is my good fortune that because of my work among the poor and downtrodden each community and caste claims me as one of its own.

Q. *Why is your own chief minister opposing the proposed amendment?*

A. After having heard, yourself, what communal venom the chief minister has poured on me, don't you think this question is fully answered by the chief minister himself?

Q. *The chief minister says that when he took over there was no administration at all.*

A. I am forced to make a comment which I have so far refrained from, that the situation today is 100 per cent worse than what it was when Babasaheb Bhosale was asked to resign.

Q. *And what do you say about Vasantdada's allegation that some people in his party are in a deliberate conspiracy to dislodge him by implying that the state is unstable?*

A. Vasantdada should not be given that much importance that we all need to get together and conspire to pull him down. Conspiracy is needed to dislodge a person who is strong and stable. I don't think he is either. We refrain from doing anything in Maharashtra because we are the dutiful followers of Mrs Indira Gandhi and if any harm is done to the Congress(I) she will ultimately be the sufferer.

Q. *You have been accused of trying to blackmail Mrs Gandhi.*

A. Mrs Gandhi is my leader and I hold her in the highest esteem, respect and affection, which has been demonstrated beyond the shadow of a doubt on more than half a dozen occasions since 1953, both in and out of power. The question of my blackmailing Mrs Gandhi is wishful thinking of those like Jethmalani who use nothing but bullying and blackmailing tactics themselves.

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Patil made a name for himself not so much as irrigation minister in the V.P. Naik and S.B. Chavan ministries in the mid-'70s but earlier when, in the key posts of president of the Maharashtra Congress(I) and president of the Maharashtra State Banking Cooperative he was known as the strongman of the state, thanks to his iron grip on the cooperative sector. In fact he was at that time accused of virtually running a parallel government.

Today the one time strongman of Maharashtra may be losing his hold slightly on his pet cooperative sector as evidenced in the fact that last month his nominees for chairman and the deputy chairman of the Sangli cooperative bank were defeated by Gulabrao Patil's nominees, something unthinkable a decade ago. Patil, known affectionately as Dada (elder brother) is also afflicted by several ailments including diabetes and sciatica though he still maintains a long and hectic schedule.

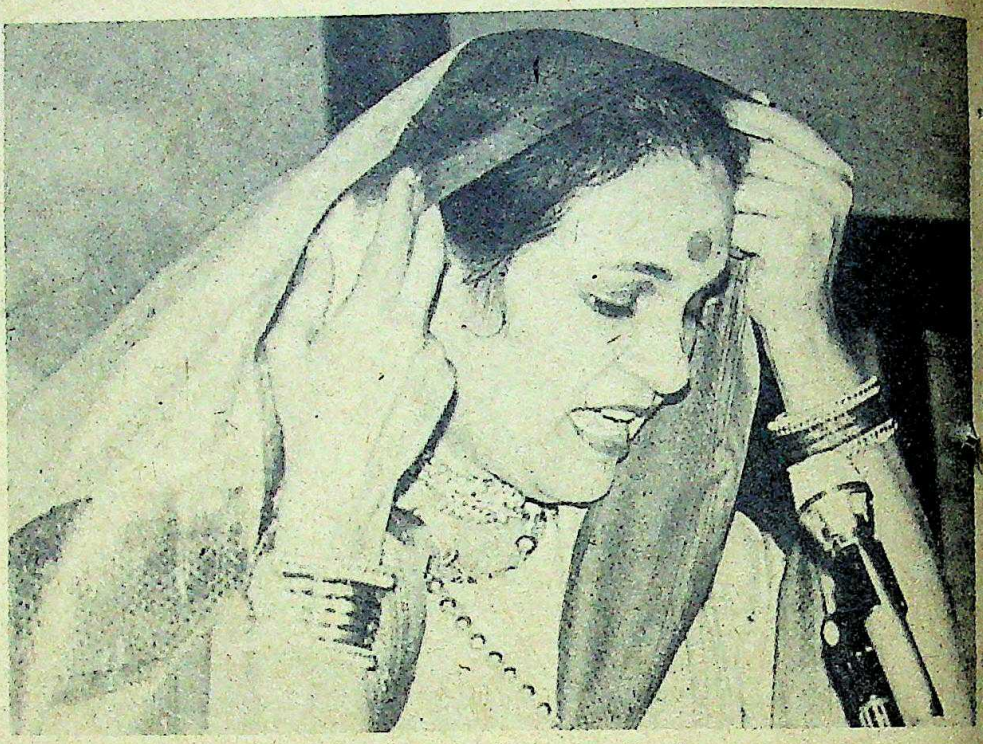
In any forthcoming election, Maharashtra is of vital importance to the ruling party. Being the dividing line between the non-Congress south and the Congress north, Pawar is trying to create a psychological war fear that the winds of change which have blown in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka will this time be sweeping Maharashtra. This is partially wishful thinking—certain regions of the state such as Vidarbha on the eastern tip have always voted faithfully for the Congress(I). The Opposition has fared well in the more prosperous western sector and in the cities, such as Bombay.

Maharashtra is a state where no particular opposition party is dominant. Although, in the 1980 election the Congress(S) secured 45 assembly seats, around 35 later defected to the Congress(I). "In Maharashtra," notes Pawar ruefully, "we are pragmatic people." Today the party position in the assembly is: approximately 238 Congress(I), 14 BJP, 14 Janata, 8 Congress(S), 8 PWP, 2 CPI(M) and 2 CPI plus a scattering of independents. Though some political parties are antagonistic to each other such as the BJP and Janata and the BJP and the leftist groups, Pawar is an important cementing factor as possible leader of the coalition. He has earlier experience in his PDF government of running a coalition government that comprises diametrically opposite parties.

But even a united opposition would have an uphill task considering the deep-rooted Congress(I) infrastructure in the state. The key problem for the ruling party high command at election time is how to keep all the divergent sections of the party happy. For the Congress(I), the biggest threat in the state comes not from the Opposition but from the enemy within.

COOMI KAPOOR and CHANDER UDAY SINGH

DAILY: MUKESH



A bejewelled Shalinitai faces the public: glittering presence

SHALINITAI PATIL

The Bettering Half

SHE FILLS the room with her presence and talk, and as the room is already crammed with supplicants seeking a few drops from the fountainhead of power, her presence is all the larger. She dresses more like a pushy socialite than a politician: striking saris, a large red bindi that clamours for attention, fingers and toes lathered with eye-catching nail varnish, French perfumes and pearl and diamond jewellery. But she is not a dressy virago, she is the wife of Maharashtra Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil and member of Parliament from Sangli. For Shalinitai Patil, 51, aggressive, acerbic and ambitious, the glitter and glib chatter are just another way of proclaiming her power. "Everything that happens to me is not only because I am Vasantdada's wife," she says in her throaty voice. "The party also sees what I am personally capable of doing. All other leaders have wives, but are they well-known?"

The answer to that, of course, is that they are not. After all, which politician's wife can hit the headlines day after day, on subjects as varied as a political mission to Kerala to shore up a tottering ministry, being in the midst of an income tax raid in a Bangalore hotel room, and her involvement with any number of trusts which have allegedly been used to collect an inordinate amount of funds? Which other politician's wife partners her husband in a relationship that has so far paid rich dividends for both?

Shalinitai's clout in Maharashtra politics is never more visible than at B-4 Madame Cama Road, opposite the Mantralaya. The bungalow is allotted to the chief minister, but he prefers to work out of the official residence, Varsha. The ministerial bungalow is really Shalinitai's seat of power. She runs a regular durbar there, receiving government officials and even ministers, and three ante-chambers to her office are rarely less than crowded when she is in town. Patil sees nothing wrong with these visits and discussions "if they do it simply out of respect and if there is no obligation". But there are many who take a less rosy view. Says Congress(I) MLA S.N. Desai: "A major misfortune of the Maharashtra Government is that the chief minister's wife feels she can impose her whims and fancies on it."

Understandably, Patil disagrees, but for 20 years he has been expressing helplessness over his wife's controversial activities. "I have no quarrel with my wife, but that doesn't mean that she follows everything I do," he confesses. Others are not as charitable. "This excuse that he doesn't know what she is up to is getting rather worn out," says Gobind Talwalkar, editor of the *Maharashtra Times*. Even her most ardent admirers admit that Shalinitai's political reach

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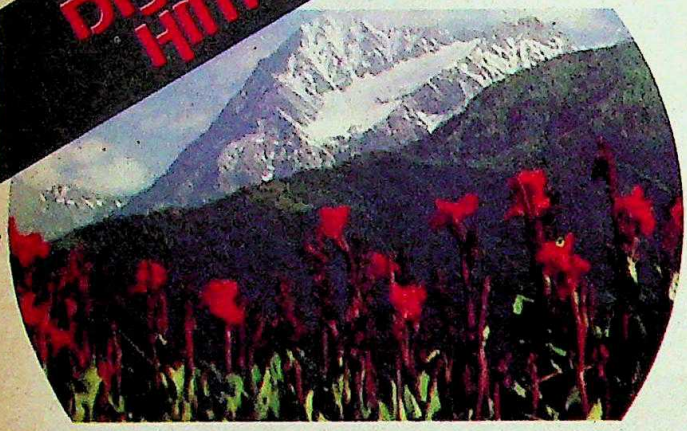
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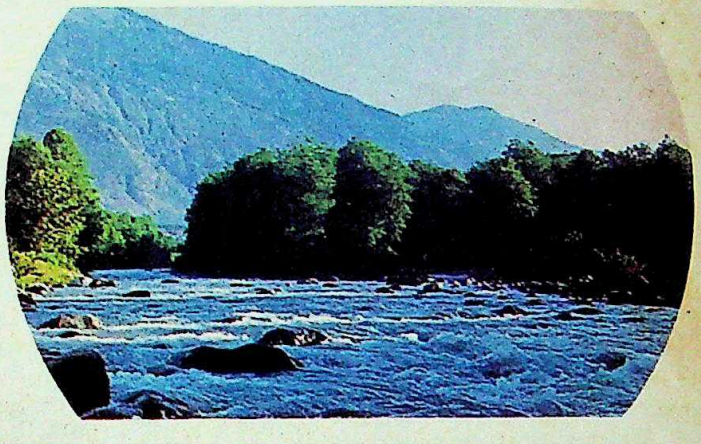
Suitings for the Connoisseur

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DISCOVERING HIMACHAL - 1

ENCHANTING LANDSCAPE





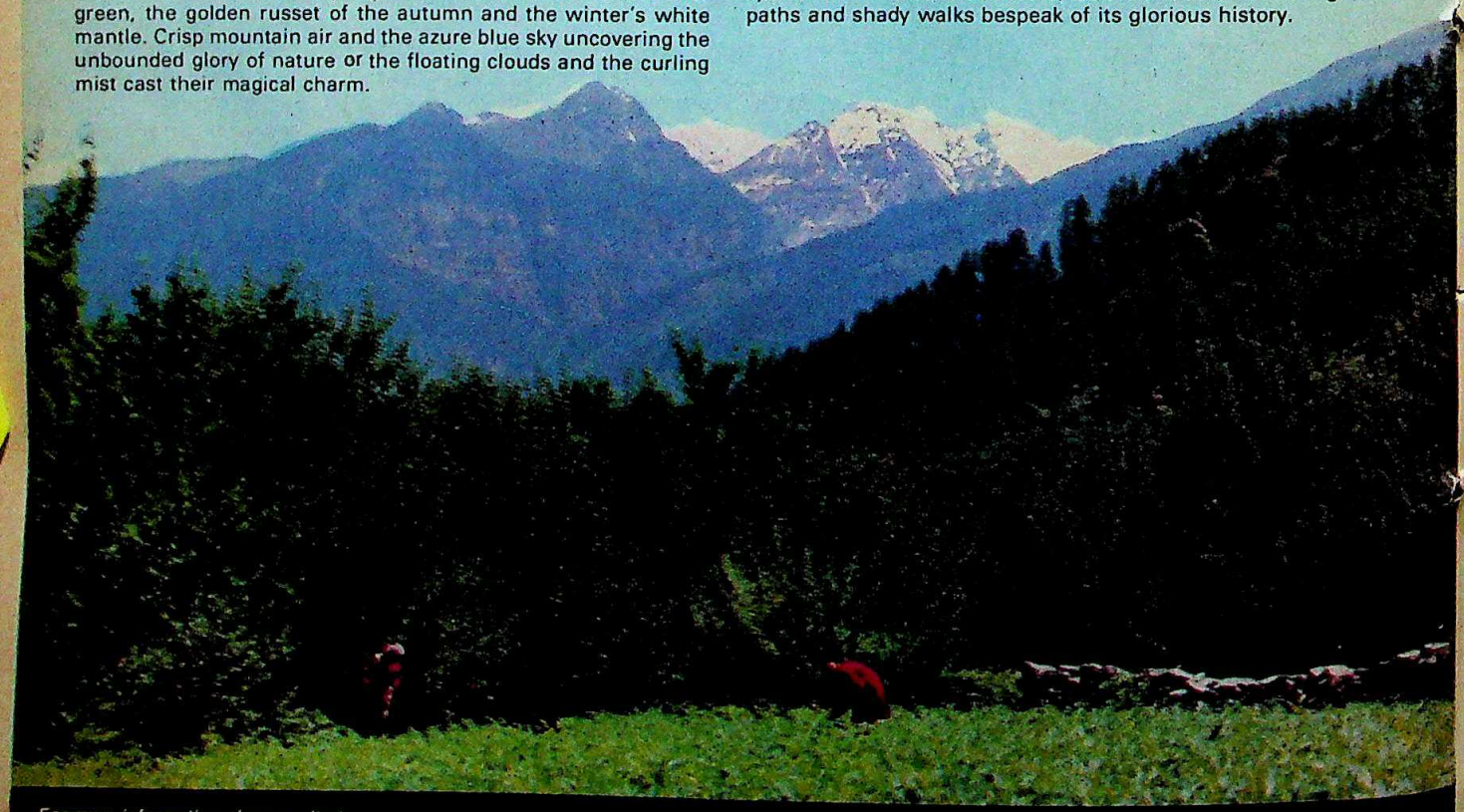
"Great things are done when men and mountains meet:
This is not done by jostling in the street".
William Blake

Misty snow capped mountain tops, the long winding shady walks, shimmering streams, ancient temples and the bountiful orchards. Each hill and valley unfolds a sight more magical, more enchanting than the other.

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And one cannot forget Simla, a dream town perched on the spur of a hill. Its cobbled bazars, Gothic houses, undulating bridle paths and shady walks bespeak of its glorious history.



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HIMACHAL TOURISM

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matches that of the most powerful of Maharashtra politicians.

Consider the centrepiece of the vast array of trusts and cooperatives with which she is associated: the Rajmata Jijau Pratishthan set up in 1975 with the avowed aim of building 52 village hospitals to cover each district in the state. Last year, it managed to acquire a slice of prime property at the expense of a more worthy cause, the Spastics Society of India. In 1982, shortly after the death of its mentor, film star Nargis Dutt, the society was allotted a 2,000 sq m plot in the Bandra reclamation to build a National Institute for Spastics. On January 7, 1983, Mother Teresa laid the foundation-stone in a well-publicised ceremony and by mid-1983 the society had spent roughly Rs 70,000 on preliminary construction.

Enter Shalinitai, founder president of the pratishthan, whose husband was by this time ensconced in the chief minister's gaddi. Convinced that the land should be used not for the spastics but for a Shivaji museum—a pet Shalinitai project—she persuaded the state Government to re-allot the Bandra land to her trust. After all, the trust was named after Shivaji's mother Rajmata Jijau with whom she evidently identifies and once wanted to make a film about.

The society was, to be sure, assured that it would get an even larger plot in the same area, but whereas the earlier plot came free, the new 3,000 sq m plot would attract a Rs 3.5 lakh 'channelising fee'. "This is a bit of cheek," declared a society worker. The society, out of fear of repercussions on its work has chosen not to make a noise.

Shalinitai takes pride in the work of the pratishthan, as indeed she does in all her charity work. She talks loftily about institutions such as the 14 mahila cooperative banks she has been instrumental in setting up all over the state. The banks, managed by women for the benefit of women, today have deposits of over Rs 5 crore. "My next important activity was setting up rural hospitals under the Rajmata Jijau Pratishthan," she says, "four hospitals have been started and the fifth is under construction."

Not all these projects, however, reflect the good intentions she exudes. The functioning of the Jijau hospitals is far from exemplary and over the years, since she started out in the business of charitable trusts more than 10 years ago, much of her work has come in for adverse comment. Indeed, most of the long promised projects have still to come up even though extensive land has been gifted for this purpose.

The Belapur project, for instance. In 1978, when Patil was chief minister in his first tenure, the City Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO) was persuaded to sell the Jijau trust roughly four acres of hilltop land in the heart of the Belapur industrial belt for a token payment of one rupee. That could be explained by the fact that the trust proposed to put up cottage hospitals to cater to the industrial workers, but it isn't easy to see why the Rs 1 lakh service charge levied by CIDCO remained unpaid, why no hospitals have been built six years later though CIDCO said they must be complete in three years, and why the trust has been reportedly asking CIDCO to waive the service charge on the ground that no service was rendered. In the process, of course, the trust has been enriched by a property which at current market prices is worth several crore rupees.



Shalinitai and Vasantdada Patil as chief minister in 1978 with the then President Sanjeeva Reddy at a Jijau Pratishthan function: controversial charities

Among her achievements as revenue minister in the Antulay government, Shalinitai counts the creation of four new revenue divisions in Nasik, Amravati, Jalna and Sindhudurg. True enough, revenue collection was facilitated by this and the creation of some 60 or 70 tehsils in the Vidarbha region. There is, however, a fly in the ointment. Back in 1981, the state Government selected Kudal Powashi as the headquarters of the newly formed Sindhudurg. This was based on the recommendation of two state commissions, and the Government notified some 1,260 acres for acquisition and spent more than Rs 2 crore to construct temporary structures. Last year in March, one month after Patil took over as chief minister, Shalinitai wrote the incumbent minister of revenue, Shantaram Ghollap, a letter demanding that the capital be shifted to Oras where, by a strange coincidence, the panchayat has donated 25 acres of land to the Jijau trust to build a hospital.

The result: the government machine temporarily was like Mohammed Bin Tughlak, affecting a second transfer from Kudal to Oras until a writ petition in the high court by the sarpanch of Powashi temporarily stopped it in its tracks. The Government has since backed down saying that a decision has still to be taken on where the headquarters of Sindhudurg should be.

Another questionable venture is the Priyadarshani Housing Cooperative for women. Shalinitai floated it in 1972 and the same year bought an 8,500 sq m estate on Bhowani Shankar Road in Dadar on behalf of the cooperative. But this was an unusual transaction: there were already three buildings on the plot occupied by a dozen or so industrial units and clearly no room for a housing scheme.

Considering the price of real estate and the premium on tenancy, nobody willingly gives up occupancy in Bombay. With the change in ownership, several tenants took injunctions from a court charging that the landlord was trying to evict them by harassment and threats, particularly of using political clout. In January 1973, a midnight fire engulfed one of the buildings and the lok ayukta was asked to review a charge that this was part of a deliberate move to evict the tenants in order to set up a cooperative housing society and cooperative bank there.

THE STALEMATE between the tenants and landlords continued for many years, but suddenly in 1983, with Patil back as chief minister, it was broken—and with amazing speed. The seven tenants in Block A of the estate moved out in quick succession and the building was speedily demolished. The partially burnt Block B stands empty and only Block C is currently occupied.

But, instead of making plans for the long awaited housing cooperative scheme and the bank, the owners have evidently now contracted with a building developer to make a commercial complex, Bhowani Complex. And considerable space in the proposed complex has already been sold off to prospective tenants. At today's rates the vacant plot would be worth around Rs 2 crore.

A complication is that a suit was filed in the Bombay High Court last year against the Priyadarshani Housing Cooperative claiming that the property had been sold for Rs 40 lakh to a company, Steelco Enterprises, but that subsequently, instead of yielding possession, the cooperative had given the

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SHALINITAI PATIL

"Ambition is not bad"

ALWAYS impeccably turned out in chanderi saris, Shalinitai Patil fills her day with public meetings, discussions, interviews and ceremonial activity. Last month, in Sangli for a "meet-the-people" schedule she took time off to talk to Correspondent CHANDER UDAY SINGH. *Excerpts:*

Q. *Your critics accuse you of functioning like an extra-constitutional authority. Why is it that government servants constantly visit your office?*

A. I do not tell anybody to come. But I have been a minister and I am very active, so if some officer wants to come, if he wants to visit me or do work regarding my constituency what is wrong? Other people go to Sachivalaya and even I have no problem about going there. But officers feel that why should they give me this trouble, it's just across the road so they drop in to see me.



Shalinitai: woman of action

Q. *Surely it is improper for government files to be brought to you.*

A. Why should files come to me? What do I have to do with official files? If I have work it is only for my charitable hospitals or for my constituency; where is the question of files?

Q. *When Dada first became a minister in Naik's cabinet you were accused of misusing Irrigation Department machinery for your trusts.*

A. This is all untrue. The irrigation people have nothing to do with hospitals. How could they help me in any way?

Q. *The Jijau trust in particular has come in for a lot of criticism that you have not fulfilled its aims and objectives.*

A. That is not correct. The Jijau has started four hospitals and the fifth is under construction in Nasik.

The delay in the Jijamata picture came about because the film had to be stopped for financial difficulties. It has a budget of Rs 60 lakh and we made two-thirds. But we ran out of funds. You see there were many delays. Parikshat Sahni who was playing Shivaji fell off a horse and was in hospital for six months. Then Sunil Dutt's wife Nargis fell ill so he couldn't come for shooting. For three years such problems kept coming up. But now we plan to give the film to an independent producer to complete. We will definitely complete it.

Q. *The handing over of the government hospital at Vashi to the trust was also questioned.*

A. CIDCO wanted to sell because running a hospital is a very expensive job. It is not true that anything was improper, we gave their price—almost Rs 30 lakh. Most of it is paid. I don't know the exact figures but you can say that most of it is paid.

Q. *What is the total corpus of the Jijau trust?*

A. The trust has about Rs 1 crore investment. But the money has been raised mostly by speeches not donations as you said. Babasaheb Purandare, our vice-chairman is a famous historian and his speeches have helped to raise a lot of funds.

Q. *There were also charges of irregularity in the Maharashtra State Farming Corporation when you headed it.*

A. No, there were no irregularities at all. Vasantrao Phalke (*her brother whom she appointed managing director*) has already explained everything. The farming corporation had been in losses since it was started in 1962-63 but in the year when I ran it we got a better crop and very good prices, so losses of Rs 4 crore were written off and we repaid Rs 1 crore to the Government. If they made so much benefit they would also have to give some benefits to some persons. Motorcycles and cars were given but these expenses were hardly 0.5 per cent of profits.

Q. *Is it true that you have set you sights on the chief minister's chair?*

A. Things do not come to one by directly trying for them. I have not pushed my own claims for leadership, if it has to come to me it will. But ambition is not a bad thing, ambition must be there otherwise what do you get in life? And when ambition is there it should be for some very high thing.

Q. *Is it true that you and Dada disagree on fundamental issues like you accepting the Revenue Ministry from Antulay when he had turned the offer down?*

A. These are small things, not important. We might have small disagreements but we have never fought each other. It is not true about the Antulay ministry. I will not and do not want to build anything at the expense of family life.

property to another builder to develop.

Shalinitai denies that there was any force used to evict the tenants. Stating that it was originally an old textile mill complex, she says that "all that has been cleared now, more than a year ago, and we have settled all the tenants without any problems, we paid them whatever they wanted."

Even for a state where private trusts run by politicians are thick on the ground, the Patil clan is in a class by itself. Precise estimates of the holdings of Patil-controlled trusts are impossible because of their reluctance to file statutory financial declarations with the charities commissioner, but investigations by INDIA TODAY suggest that the sums at their disposal are huge.

VASANTDADA Patil's Vasantrao Banduji Patil Trust runs a medical college and an institute of technology and has a corpus of a little under Rs 1 crore. The Vasantdada Vikas Pratishthan is working on industrial estates and other "development" projects in the Sangli area. Shalinitai's Rajmata Jijau Foundation, commonly known as the Jijamata Pratishthan, had by 1978 collected Rs 4.5 crore and controls land and hospitals taken from government agencies worth up to five times as much.

Shalinitai's Srimant Ranisahib Putlabai Pratishthan has roughly 110 acres of farmland in Thane's Padgha village worth upward of Rs 10 lakh and the 14 mahila cooperative banks she founded in the early '70s, and still controls through her nominees on their boards, have combined deposits of over Rs 5 crore. In addition, the Patil liking for trusts and cooperative money agencies extends to other family members too: her brother Manohar controls two Bombay-based urban cooperative banks and his son Prakash plans to join the bandwagon and set one up.

Despite their huge bank balances, the working of the Patil trusts appear to have concentrated more on accumulating land and property than on fulfilling their aims and objects.

In 1975 the Government gave Shalinitai the modern, 80-bed hospital at Vashi built by CIDCO. Jijau was to pay the Rs 30 lakh cost of the land, building and equipment in instalments spread over 10 years. A concessional 9 per cent interest was charged and government grants assured. Oddly enough, far from being in a remote rural area, Vashi is an industrial township in the New Bombay area.

The foundation has flouted most clauses of the November 26, 1975, contract it entered into with CIDCO, as is made clear by a detailed report CIDCO PHO/218 of 1979 filed by CIDCO's public health officer. It has not reserved 30 out of 80 beds for free treatment as sti-

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pulated and has been accused of charging rates higher than those in Bombay.

Although clause 8 (D) of the contract expressly states that the hospital is to be run on charitable and not profit-making lines, Shalinitai's personal publicist Indrani Sarkar admitted that "Vashi is doing extremely well, it is a profit-making hospital", and that the trust was now considering adding some high-priced air-conditioned rooms. Shalinitai says "there is demand from industrialists and people of Vashi for deluxe rooms" and adds that they are doing this "since it is very expensive to run the hospital".

Clause 9 gave CIDCO the right to nominate three members to the hospital's advisory committee. But for six years the trust actively resisted this, and even after CIDCO Chairman Ram Kapse, Managing Director L.C. Gupta and Public Health Officer S.R. Phadnis were co-opted on the committee in 1981, no meetings have been held yet. The trust has paid only Rs 12 lakh of the Rs 30 lakh and owes well over Rs 15 lakh in interest. With one year of the 10-year repayment period left, Jijau now owes CIDCO more than the original cost of the hospital.

The stories of Shalinitai's other hospitals are similar. The 25-bed Alibagh hospital which dates back to British times was handed over to the Jijau trust in 1977 by D.N. Patil, chairman of the Colaba Maternity and Infant Welfare Association, without the sanction of the charities commissioner. Coincidentally the Government withdrew around this time some half a dozen police cases pending against D.N. Patil, an opposition PWP legislator. The Alibagh hospital, though self-sufficient is run on a shoe-string budget while it receives generous grants from the state and Central governments.

Another gratis hospital for the Jijau is the 25-bed hospital at Sindkhedraja in Buldana district, which was handed over by the Jijamata Smarak Samiti Trust. This trust, founded in 1960 with Y.B. Chavan as president, for some reason in 1977 completely changed its trustees with Shalinitai taking over as chairman, at the same time as Patil became chief minister. Once again the charities commissoner's sanction was overlooked for a hospital transfer. Nor has the trust filed the mandatory statements about its income and corpus despite at least three reminders over the last 24 years. "You forget about this trust and concentrate on the Jijau foundation," was the cryptic reply of accountant S. Prasad when asked the antecedents of the smarak trust.

Another seemingly forgotten trust which pops up in the charities commissioner's books is the Jijamata Sanmaan Samiti founded by Shalinitai in 1974, once again with similar aims—of erecting statues, schools, colleges and maternity homes. The samiti

THE PATILS

Family Spree

IF POLITICIANS do well, can their families be far behind? Obviously not, if Indian politics is any guide, and the Patils are no exception. In the one year that Vasantdada Patil has been in office, advancement and progress have come to them in ample measure.

Last year, Shalinitai's brother Manohar Phalke was made general secretary of the Rashtriya Mazdoor Sangh despite a virtual revolt among members of the organisation over his elevation. Phalke was a relative newcomer in labour relations. On the contrary, his past record as managing director of the Lakshmi Consumer Cooperative Stores founded by Shalinitai scarcely evokes confidence. The stores went into liquidation in 1981 after defaulting on a Rs 30 lakh repayment to the Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank.

A few months ago, when the bank moved to recover the overdue loan, its General Manager, D.B. Kadam, was suddenly superseded by Deputy General Manager V.B. Sabnis, who was made another general manager but senior to Kadam. The managing director's post, vacant for several months, was filled by a representative of the Aurangabad Cooperative Bank. The recovery move no longer seems to be progressing.

Another brother of Shalinitai's, Vasant Phalke, was nominated a member of the Maharashtra State Farming Corporation in October last year, although only a few months earlier an audit report revealed large-scale financial irregularities during 1980-81 when Phalke was officiating as manager of the corporation and Shalinitai was chairman (INDIA TODAY, October 31, 1983). A few days before the incriminating audit report was to be discussed by the corporation's board, dominated at the time by nominees of Babasaheb Bhosale and inimical to Patil's interests, the chief minister dissolved the board and reconstituted it with Phalke and other associates as members.







(From top) Prakash Patil, Manohar Phalke and Vasant Phalke: quick advancement

Shalinitai's daughter Shobha was in October last year allotted one acre of land in Mahabaleshwar by the state Government from a plot reserved for a housing scheme for the Revenue Department. Shobha had applied for a plot three years earlier but the file only moved after Patil became chief minister. And then it moved with alacrity: within three days of the registration of the plot on December 6, the land was surveyed and formally handed over. Moreover, Shobha's annual lease was a mere Rs 960 for a plot which would fetch at least Rs 3–4 lakh in the open market. But public pressure seems to have finally denied Shobha her windfall. After the story broke in the *Tarun Bharat* newspaper in Pune and was picked up by other dailies, Patil announced last fortnight that the plot would be returned to the Government.

Rajindra, Shalinitai's son, a commercial art student who also runs an interior design firm called Dialogue, was last year awarded a Rs 7 lakh contract to decorate the Maharashtra pavilion for the State Industries Fair in Delhi. Dialogue, which he owns in partnership, won the contract though there were lower tenders.

Stepson Prakash is in a different political camp, having lost out to Shalinitai in the battle for the Sangli Congress(I) Lok Sabha seat last October. He has made a start in what he says is social work by planning a cooperative bank, proving, thereby, that he is a chip off the old block. Soon he plans to open a tomato ketchup factory to add to a packing unit he already owns in Sangli. Recently, Prakash was made a director of Associated Journals Ltd, the group that publishes the *National Herald* and *Quami Awaz*. Although the group no longer publishes a newspaper in Bombay, Patil has sanctioned it a 300 sq m plot in Bandra to build a complex. Interestingly enough, Managing Editor Yashpal Kapoor had been trying since 1980 to get a plot.

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too has ignored reminders to submit its financial statements.

The Jijau Foundation was equally slow about submitting its financial statements till 1981, when it suddenly woke up. That year it made a number of red ink amendments to its aims and objectives in the charities commissioner's books and a new board without Shalinitai was nominated. Trust public relations officer Nirbhoy Singh explains the dramatic changes saying that around this time all "pratishthans" had come into disrepute after the Antulay affair. As a result nervous income tax officers even withdrew the 100 per cent tax exemption on Jijau donations earlier granted under section 35 CCA of the Income Tax Act.

Despite increased reporting to the charities commissioner, however, precise information about the money in Jijau's corpus remains unavailable. Shalinitai's public declaration in 1978 was that Rs 4.5 crore had been collected, but last fortnight she stated that it was only Rs 1 crore (*see interview*). Accountant Prasad stated that the corpus was around Rs 45 lakh, Singh said it was over Rs 1 crore and a trust insider said it was Rs 2 crore.

Income statements filed with the charities commissioner are no help. The 1981-82 returns declare an income of Rs 32.69 lakh but in the following year declared income was down to Rs 15.76 lakh, a steep drop for a public trust since the corpus of a trust can never be reduced.

Other financial dealings of the Patil trusts and cooperative institutions are equally murky. The Jijamata film, budgeted at Rs 60 lakh and begun in 1977, wound up with nine reels shot in Jaipur and over Rs 20 lakh spent elsewhere before it stopped for paucity of funds. "We are in touch with independent producers and will see that it gets completed," said Shalinitai Patil last fortnight. But trust insiders confide that the producers who have seen rushes of the film write off all earlier shooting as "junk". "Maybe we will add some razzle-dazzle to make it more appealing," says Nirbhoy Singh.

Some other ventures promoted by Shalinitai have also come a cropper. The Indira Sahakari Bank at Bombay was found some years ago to be sick, since irregular loan allotments had depleted its assets, and an inquiry by the Cooperatives Department of the Government pointed out major irregularities in its operations. Today the bank is being nursed by a coordination committee of the Reserve Bank of India and the Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank, but nevertheless has Shalinitai's nominees on its board.

Shalinitai, who initially derived her strength from her husband—from the day they were married and he, as chairman of the Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank, appointed her secretary with all the perks of government office—has been moving to carve an independent source of power. She has cultivated powerful Central leaders like Buta Singh and Pranab Mukherjee. She is a willing troubleshooter and, having defied convention by marrying Vasantdada shortly after the death of her first husband Shyamrao Jadhav even while Vasantdada's first wife was still alive, Shalinitai is no stranger to controversy.



The Patils at Antulay's daughter's wedding: vying for power

But for Shalinitai, the intense speculation about her role in destabilising Hegde's Government and disclosures of almost-simultaneous bank lending by her cooperatives are merely minor hindrances which she brushes aside with an airy laugh. She has learned to take the flak in her stride, often giving as good as she gets.

Her combativeness was evident in childhood. Nurtured by a father who believed that female education was the only route for equality between the sexes, her liberated spirit and naked ambition drove her even as a little girl to tie a gunnysack on her head and trudge in tattered rags to school. That relentless drive earned her a distinguished law degree even after marriage and two children, a reserved seat on the South Satara Zilla Parishad by the time her fourth child was born, and finally a launch onto the statewide stage as president of the women's wing of the MPCC.

Although she admits today that relationships and the aid of political mentors have helped her, Shalinitai pointedly insists that her "achievements" are not merely a result of being Patil's wife. But she has undoubtedly had powerful godfathers to help her on her scrabble to the top, first in Patil's traditional Sangli district rival the late Rajarambapu Patil, who as president of the zilla parishad actively promoted her cause, and later in her husband. Her life has been so colourful and the anecdotes about her political rise so popular, that when well-known Marathi writer Baba Kadam wrote his novel *Nirmala*, many readers were convinced that he had been inspired by her.

Today, Shalinitai has moved to a wider canvas. In the January 1980 general elections she took on one-time Maratha strongman Y.B. Chavan in his home constituency of Satara and whittled down his margin to around 50,000 votes. When her husband vacated the Sangli assembly seat later that year to sit in the Lok Sabha, she won comfortably and managed to get the number two place in the Cabinet of her sworn enemy, Antulay.

Shalinitai's sense of competition is so keen that Maharashtra politicians say she sees even her husband as a rival: when Bhosale was to be removed and Patil tipped as his successor, she played up her husband's ill-health to the press as if to suggest that she would be a fitter candidate. But her personal power base remains based on the patronage she doles out from her trusts and banks rather than grassroots support, and it is unlikely that she would be anywhere without her husband.

Belying the impression that there is any rift between them, Patil rushed to her rescue in the Sangli parliamentary by-election late last year, announced that he would resign the chief ministership if she lost, and saw her scrape through with an embarrassingly reduced margin of 35,805, less than a fifth of her husband's margin in 1980. In the process, he destroyed both the myth that she is a power independent of his support, and the feeling that they are politically divergent.

Patil dismisses the idea that Shalinitai can succeed him. "This cannot be. Don't speak of it. Don't even mention it. There will be a quarrel." In fact, Shalinitai lacks the necessary following among Congressmen who still see her as an extension of her husband. But the woman who sneaked into the limelight as the first woman graduate in her native Karad has travelled a long way and harbours a strong sense of ambition. Says she: "Ambition is not a bad thing, otherwise what do you get in life? And when there is ambition, it should be for some very high thing. Why aim for something small, one should aim for the top." Obviously she is not a person to be underestimated.

—COOMI KAPOOR and CHANDER UDAY SINGH

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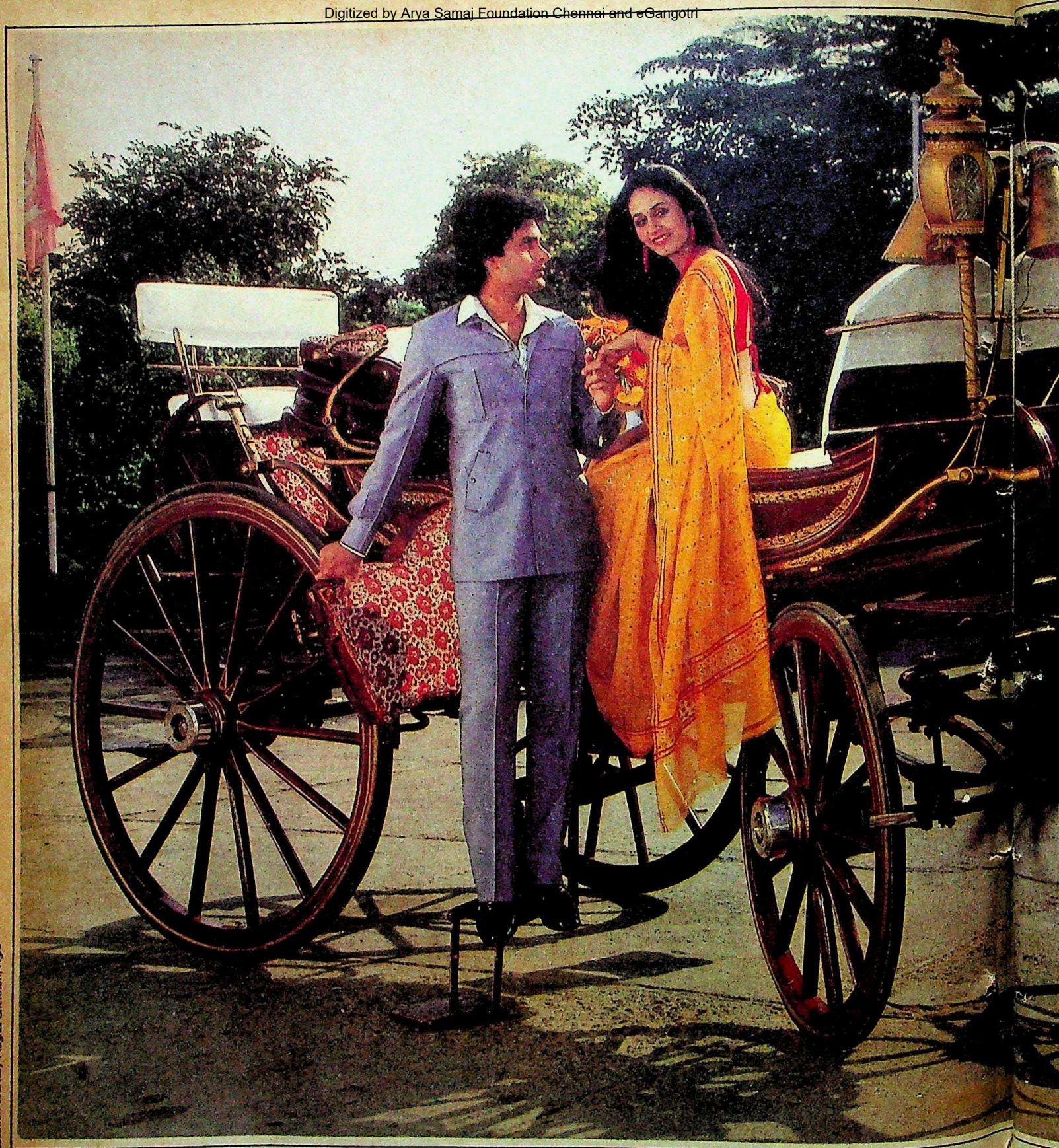
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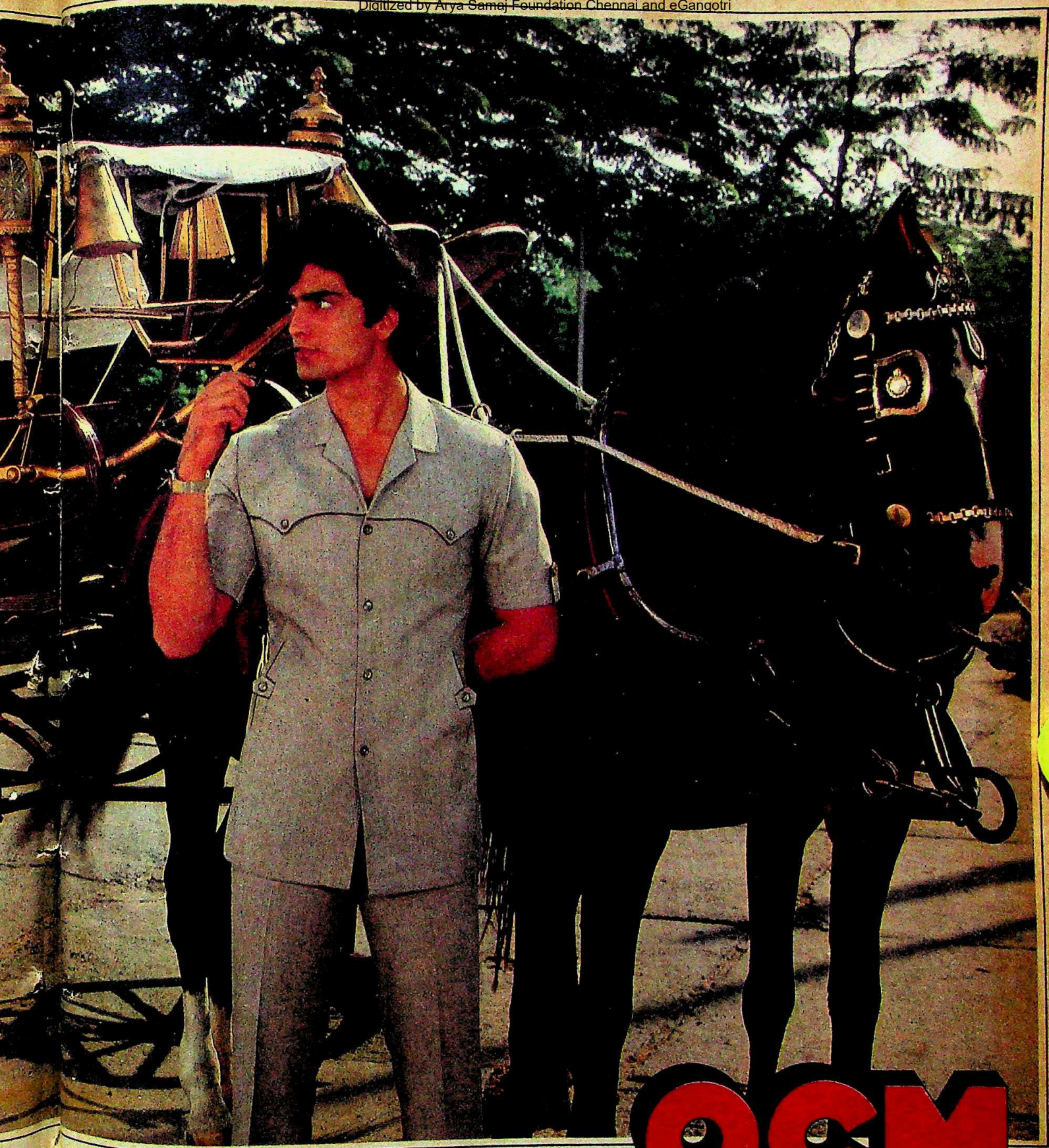
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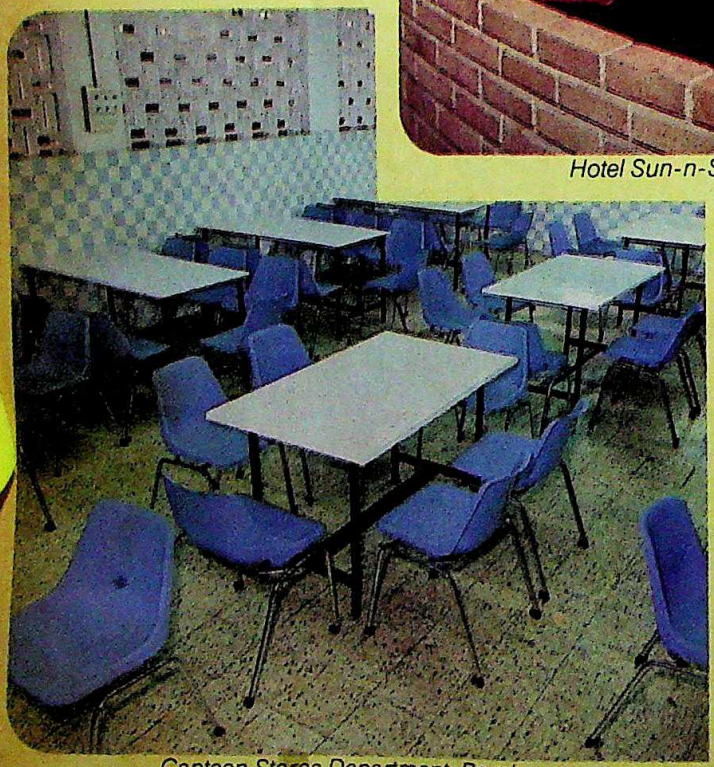
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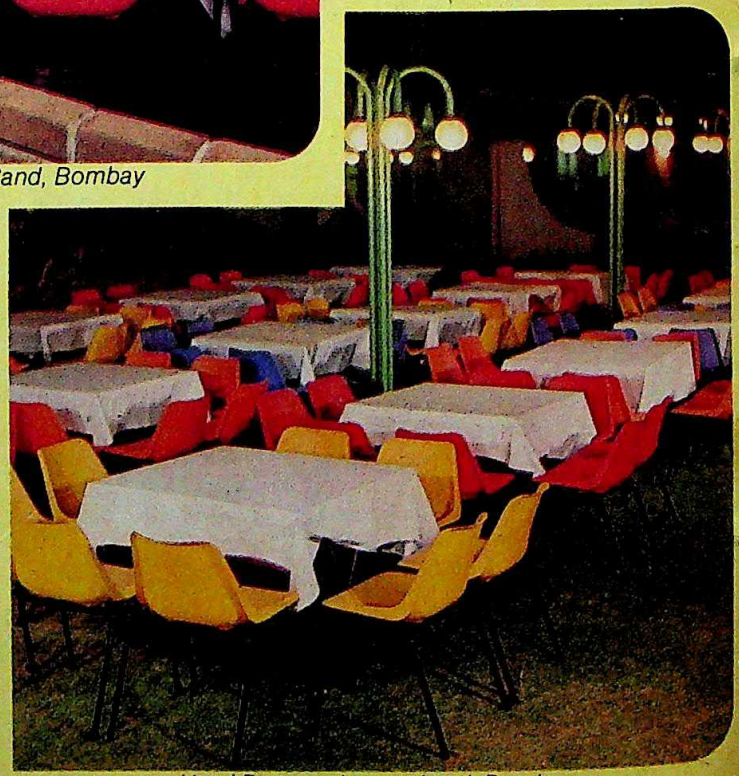


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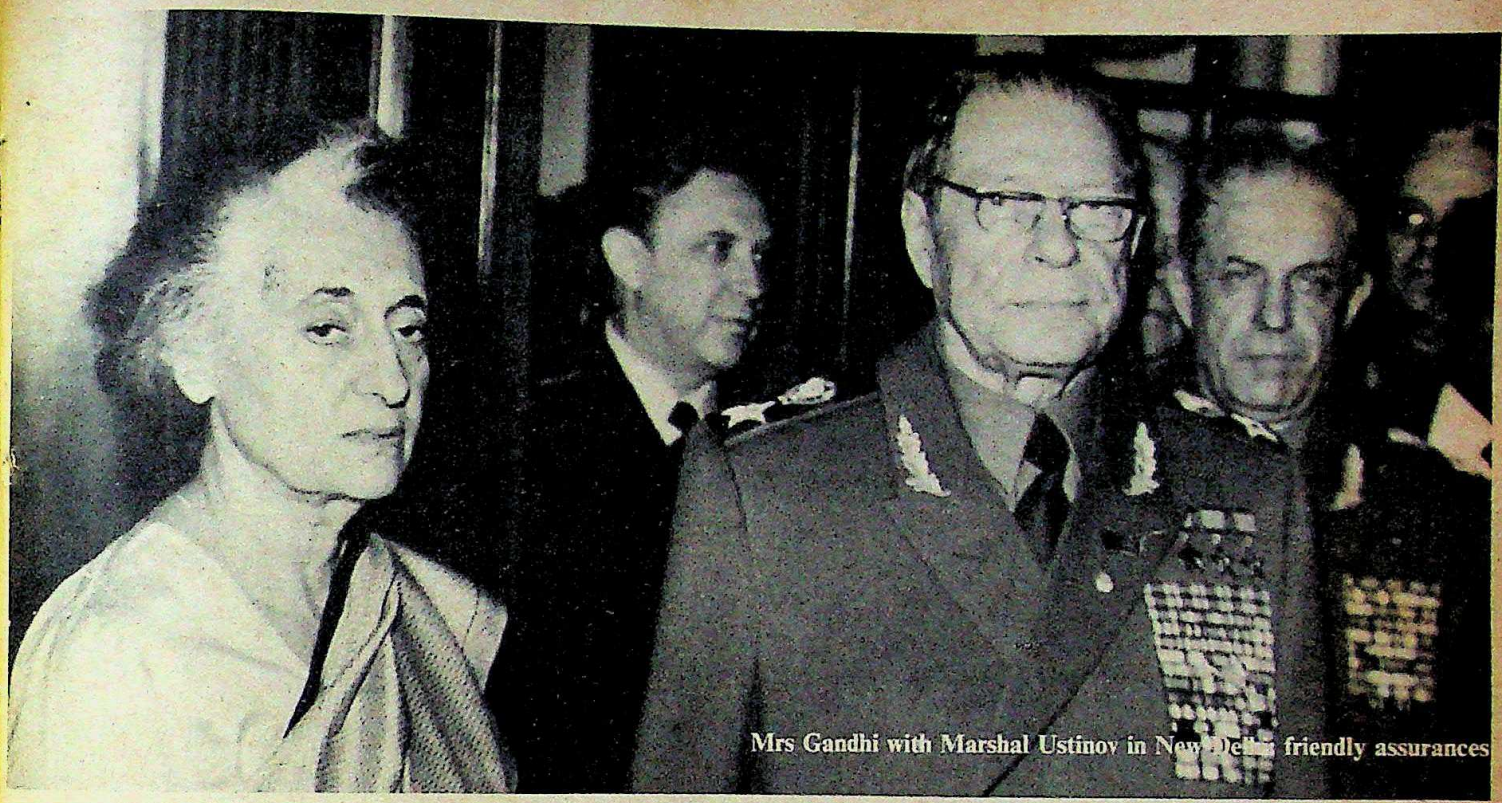
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Mrs Gandhi with Marshal Ustinov in New Delhi: friendly assurances

INDO-SOVIET RELATIONS

For Better or for Worse



THE SIX days visit to India last fortnight by the Soviet Defence Minister Marshal Dmitri Ustinov, enabled New Delhi and Moscow to place the Indo-Soviet relationship in the perspectives of the entire 1980s. The visit therefore brought to a culmination a dialogue that had begun late 1982 following the death of Leonid Brezhnev. The long-standing personal friendship between Brezhnev and Mrs Indira Gandhi had steered the relationship through the 1960s and 1970s in directions desired by both. Brezhnev's death could mean a vacuum. It did not because his successor, Yuri Andropov, took immediate care to fill the gap created by Brezhnev's death. However, a series of changes in international politics, resulting in a sharp aggravation in the US-Soviet confrontation, raised a number of issues which Andropov and Mrs Gandhi had no occasion to sit down together to discuss to mutual satisfaction. Then early February, Andropov died. His successor, Konstantin Chernenko, assured the prime minister at a brief cordial meeting in the Kremlin that there would be "no change" in the Soviet Union's policies towards India. The meeting was too short for a comprehensive exchange of views. The Soviet leadership therefore decided to send politburo member Dmitri Ustinov to India fully authorised to conduct summit-level political conversations covering the entire field of international and regional issues.

The concrete result of the Ustinov visit will be seen more in the military field than in the political. India will now receive frontier military technology from the Soviet Union at par with the Warsaw Pact countries. More than 60 per cent of the new weapons and technologies for the IAF and Indian Navy will be coming from the Soviet Union. The diversification of procurement will therefore be more limited than before.

The Ustinov visit, then, was one of the important landmarks in the 34-year-old Indo-Soviet friendship. In political and strategic importance it is comparable to the India visits of Khrushchev and Brezhnev. The Ustinov visit had indeed two dimensions. First, Ustinov represented the collective CPSU politburo leadership whose brief he was carrying. Secondly, as defence minister of the USSR, he was in a position to lend a strategic aspect to the political understanding distilled from his conversations with Mrs Gandhi and her senior cabinet colleagues. To be sure, the Ustinov-Gandhi talks were almost entirely political. However, at several points in the conversations, Ustinov assured the prime minister of "complete" and "unequivocal" Soviet support and backing if India were "in trouble". A number of times, Ustinov mentioned the Indo-Soviet treaty of 1971 to reiterate Soviet support to India in "any contingency that may arise".

Unlike in 1982, when Ustinov had paid a visit to India, the Indian Government this time played up the visit as one of considerable political and strategic significance. On March 4, the Delhi dailies ran front-page reports under 3-4-column headlines to announce the Soviet defence minister's visit with a 55-man team. Official spokesmen volunteered the information that Ustinov would have "wide-ranging talks" with the prime minister on the international situation. After the first meeting of Mrs Gandhi and Marshal Ustinov on March 5, newspapers reported that they discussed "bilateral relations, world issues and the situation in India's neighbourhood". The press also played up the fact that Marshal Ustinov discussed with Defence Minister Venkataraman "matters connected with Indo-Soviet collaboration in the defence sphere". Ustinov was reported to have conveyed to Mrs Gandhi the desire of the CPSU politburo and of General Secretary Konstantin Chernenko himself, to "assist India in the defence field".

The Indian side, then, was not in the least shy in displaying to the world the military aspect of the Indo-Soviet relationship. From several reliable sources INDIA TODAY received detailed reports of the trends of conversations between Mrs Gandhi and Marshal Ustinov. The

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BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE

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conversations produced a wide range of understanding between the two, but there were also certain areas of disagreements which, however, were not regarded as serious enough to inhibit cooperation. On a number of issues of vital importance to India, the prime minister expressed her appreciation of Soviet positions as articulated by Marshal Ustinov.

The substantive part of the discussion began with a comprehensive review by Ustinov of the international situation following the deployment of the first instalment of Pershing II American medium range missiles in Western Europe and the Soviet walk-out from the START negotiations in Geneva and the medium range missiles limitation talks in Vienna. Ustinov made it clear that the Soviet leadership took the darkest view of the global militarisation policy of the Reagan Administration and was prepared to face "any situation". Chernenko had expressed Soviet readiness to work for detente, using that word after a long while. It did not mean, however, that Moscow would return to the Geneva and Vienna talks on American terms. The most important point made by Marshal Ustinov—something that Americans do not concede—was that the Soviets had "restored" the strategic balance by deploying their own medium range missiles in East Germany and Czechoslovakia and by placing the American mainland within the range of nuclear missiles installed in submarines navigating close to the US coasts.

But the "military balance has been restored at a much higher threshold of nuclear weapons deployment, thereby increasing the risks of war, and the responsibility for this high war risk lay entirely with the Reagan Administration", Ustinov implied that it was this Soviet response to the Pershing deployment that had introduced a measure of sobriety in current American rhetoric on US-Soviet relations; there were also the pressures of the coming presidential election. The Soviet Union was ready and willing to discuss with the United States a build-down of international tensions; it had made a series of far-reaching proposals, all of which had been dismissed out of hand by Washington. At the same time, the Soviet Union was ready to face "any situation". Marshal Ustinov said that the Soviet leadership wanted India to understand the Soviet position because it attached great importance not only to India's friendship but also to its influence in world affairs as chairperson of the Non-Aligned Movement. Furthermore, the Soviet Union wanted India to remain what it is and has been: an independent, friendly country, a leading non-aligned power, a powerful force on behalf of world peace and stability.

MRS GANDHI'S response to this part of Ustinov's statement was that she did understand the Soviet point of view and had a great deal of sympathy for it. She shared Soviet concerns about US global militarism and appreciated the numerous peace initiatives taken by the Soviet leadership. She had repeatedly said that averting nuclear war was the number one task before all nations, and she would do all she could to keep this paramount issue in front of the non-aligned nations.

Mrs Gandhi explained recent developments in the subcontinent and in South Asia as well as in the Indian Ocean region. She said she was gravely concerned by certain developments such as the continued flow of high-tech US arms to Pakistan, and persistent reports that the US was looking for bases and facilities in some of the neighbouring countries. She was concerned about the general deterioration in India's security environment, Mrs Gandhi concluded.

Marshal Ustinov remarked that he took careful note of the prime minister's concerns and shared some of them. The Soviet leadership would make its own assessment of the developments in and around Pakistan. Marshal Ustinov assured the prime minister of full and complete Soviet support if India found itself "in trouble" as a result of actions on the part of any power.

In a survey of Soviet-China relations, Marshal Ustinov observed that while there had been some improvement, certain basic differences persisted, and on these the Soviets were unable to make concessions. The Soviet leaders perceived a dualism in China's current foreign policy. It was more sophisticated than before. China had given up the Maoist excesses. But, said Ustinov, it was still manipulating Soviet-American conflicts to advance its own interests. Behind the mask of an 'independent foreign policy', China was still cooperating with the United States against the Soviet Union. At the same time, China was trying to improve its relations with the USSR and was mildly critical of certain aspects of American foreign policy, especially in the Third World. China, continued Ustinov, had not stopped playing its 'American card' against Moscow and was trying to play its 'Soviet card' against the US. The US, of course, continued to try its best to exploit the differences between China and the Soviet Union to its own advantage. In contrast, Ustinov stressed, the Soviet Union followed a principled and consistent policy. It did not play a 'China card' or an 'American card'. The Soviet Union, he added, would continue its effort to improve relations with China.

Marshal Ustinov assured the prime minister of full and complete Soviet support if India found itself "in trouble" as a result of actions on the part of any power.

Sources said that the political talks led to an identity or near-identity of Soviet and Indian perceptions of the international situation. On regional issues, the Soviet side did not mirror all the concerns articulated by Mrs Gandhi. But Ustinov made it clear that India's concerns were also Soviet concerns, and Moscow would stand by India in case India felt threatened from any quarter. The two leaders agreed that the dialogue had to be carried forward on a continuing basis. Mrs Gandhi said she would try her best to be in the Soviet Union in April to witness the first space flight of the Indian astronauts. Ustinov said that Chernenko was looking forward to visiting India towards the end of 1984 or early 1985. It would be the new Soviet leader's first visit to India since 1961.

Sources said that Marshal Ustinov said very little about Pakistan in the course of his formulations; the heat was entirely on the Reagan Administration. The Soviets appear to be engaged in a serious reappraisal of their policy towards Pakistan. However, Ustinov went to great lengths during the course of his visit to repeatedly make it clear that the lynchipin of the Soviet Union's foreign policy for much of the Asian region has been and continues to be its friendship with India.

Three principal points emerged from Ustinov's conversations with Mrs Gandhi. First, the USSR had restored the strategic and military balance with the United States although this has enhanced the risk of nuclear war, for which Reagan's military buildup policy was to blame. Second, the Soviets saw the US to be retreating from the Middle East in confusion and did not expect Washington to mount an adventurist course of action in the Persian Gulf. Third, if the United States still intervened with force in the Gulf and if American intervention posed a threat to the vital interests of the Soviet Union, Moscow would not hesitate to hit back. Perhaps the single most important point for India made by the visiting Soviet leader was that if a war in the Persian Gulf region jeopardised India's oil supplies, India could count on the Soviet Union to rush to meet its requirements.

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VISVA-BHARATI

A Dream Gone Sour

AT FIRST glance, the sprawling campus of Visva-Bharati University at Santiniketan looks calm and peaceful. But under the surface, the campus simmers. Discussions with students, teachers and employees reveal gathering resentment against the proposed amendment to the Visva-Bharati Act, which is soon to be presented to Parliament. If the amendment is carried, all representative bodies at the university will henceforth be nominated.

Over the decades, the university has already tilted sharply towards centralisation and, to quote a large number of disgruntled members, "undemocratic functioning". The new amendment, the campus fears, will be the end of the atmosphere of community participation which was to have been the cornerstone of the institution that Rabindranath Tagore had envisaged.

An indicator of the depth of feeling on the campus is the fact that both the Congress-backed Chhatra Parishad(I) and the the Marxist Students Federation of India have joined forces. Gautam Bhattacharya and Subha Bose, leaders of the rival organisations, say that despite their political differences, they are determined to fight this issue together, "as it threatens our very existence".

The students are upset that the students union is henceforth to be nominated on the basis of merit. "In other words, the bookworms, who have no interest in life outside the classroom and library, will be picked up and it may be taken for granted that they will do nothing to protect our interests," says Bhattacharya. "Also, we hear that the vice-chancellor himself will be the vice-president of the union, which is surely ridiculous."

The teachers too are incensed. Amiya Gupta, economics teacher and president of the Adhyapak Sabha (teachers' association) says: "All the academic bodies—the court, the executive council and the academic council—will become nominated bodies, the implication being that we teachers are incapable of selecting representatives whom we feel can help run Visva-Bharati properly."

A mass petition, signed by almost all the teachers, students and employees, was given to the prime minister recently and a token strike last December was, by all accounts, total. Now a convention of intellectuals from all over the country is being planned "to strengthen the protest against such draconian measures".

SUMIT MITRA



Vice-chancellor Amlan Dutta: friendless on the campus

Already, the administration is largely a one-man show. Under an ordinance that was promulgated 12 years ago, most powers have been vested with the vice-chancellor. However, there is no evidence of improvement in the university since then.

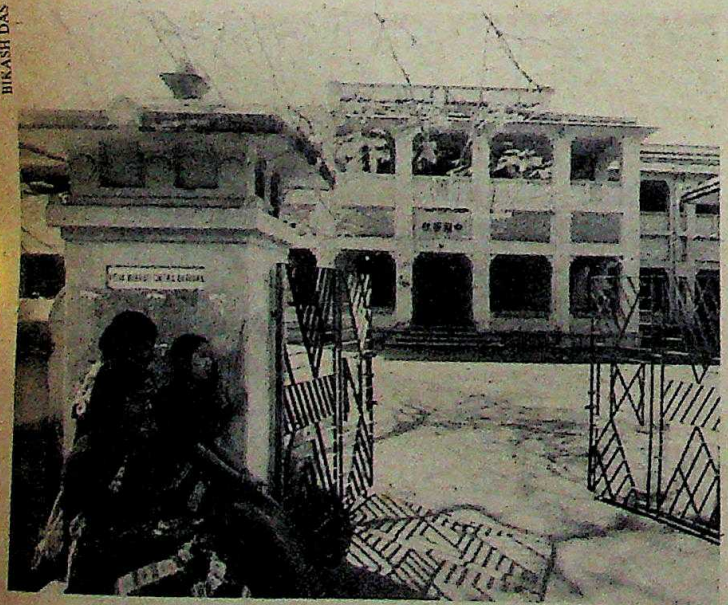
When he joined Visva-Bharati as vice-chancellor in 1980, noted economist Amlan Dutta, 60, had raised great hopes. But today he is the object of bitter criticism for the continued decline of the institution. Last fortnight, Dutta further stirred the hornets' nest by suddenly submitting his resignation, two-and-a-half years before his term ends. Though speculation was rife, Dutta himself maintained a tight-lipped silence, except to observe casually that one should not occupy any office after the age of 60.

Dutta seems to have made himself unpopular not only in Visva-Bharati but also in distant Delhi. For the first time, there are indications that the new incumbent will not be chosen from the list submitted by the outgoing vice-chancellor. The new incumbent is likely to be Ram Singh Tomar, head of the Hindi Bhavan and, by all accounts, "just another teacher".

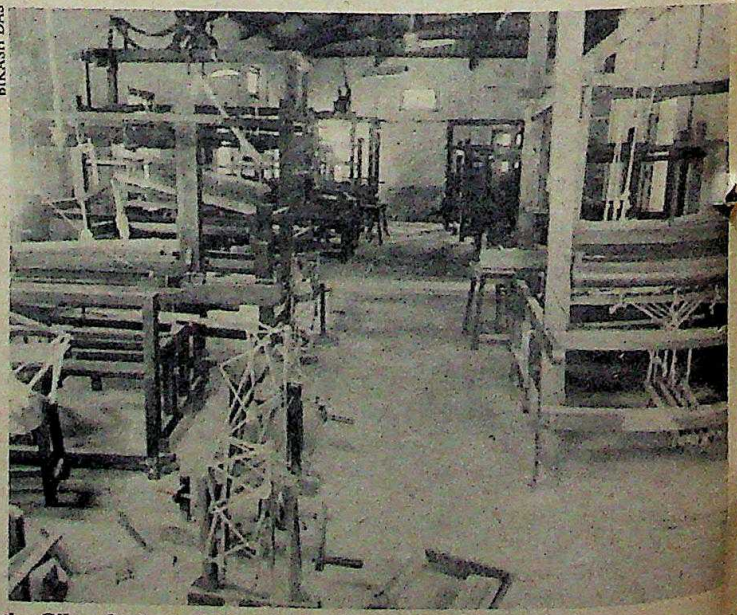
ACCORDING to the local grape-vine, Tomar—who would normally not have been anywhere in the running—is the nominee of Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee. Apparently the powerful minister has of late been taking a great deal of interest in his native district, Birbhum, in which Santiniketan is located.

Meanwhile, neglect appears to be the byword at Visva-Bharati. Dutta had an-

BIKASH DAS



BIKASH DAS



Cheena Bhavan (left) and idle looms at the Silpa Sadan: neglect is the byword

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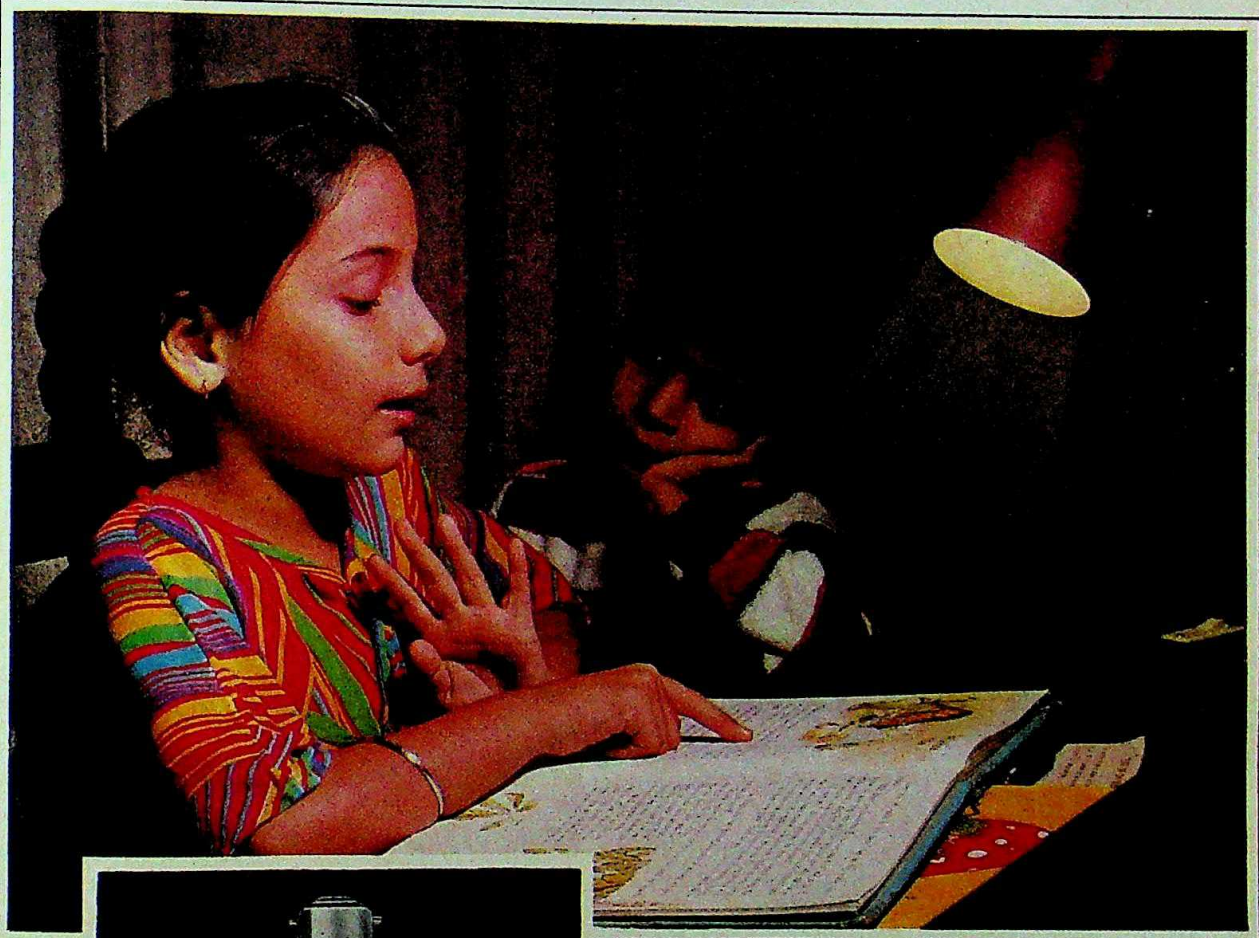
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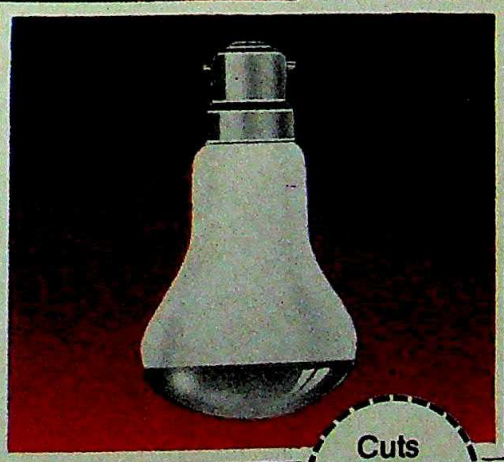
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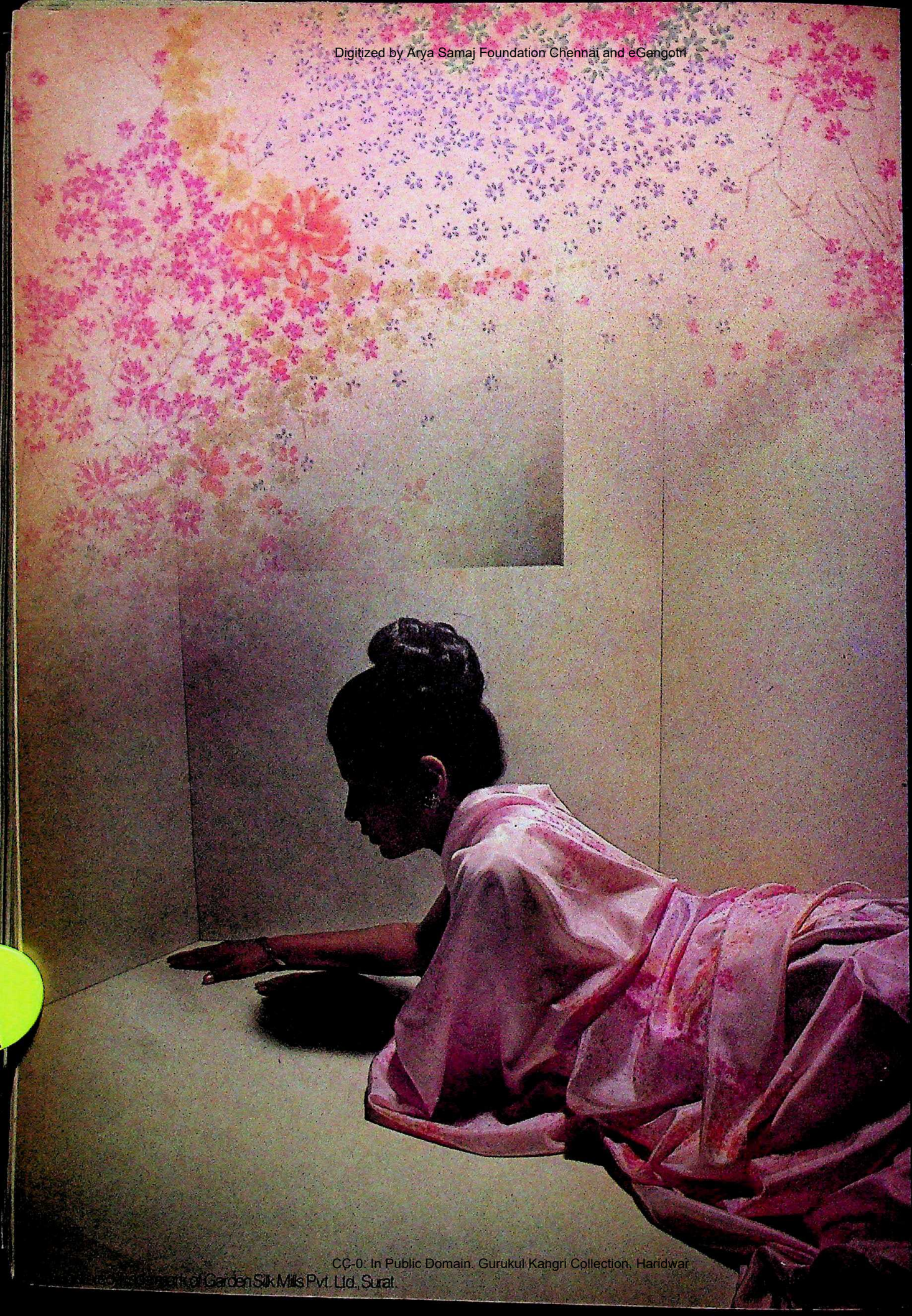
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nounced when he took over that putting Sri Niketan, the vocational wing of Visva-Bharati (Santiniketan deals with academics), back on its feet would be his top priority. But, if anything, the institution has declined.

The Palli Charcha Kendra (centre for rural studies) is a glaring example of the Niketan's lackadaisical functioning. It was set up in 1978 with a specific recommendation from the University Grants Commission (UGC)—which finances the entire university—that it be a research-cum-training establishment and that the economics department be merged with it.

That merger never took place. Though an M.Phil course in rural development was set up, it was wound up after just two sessions, with the result that a host of professors and lecturers have nothing to do. Research work at the kendra is, at best, disorganised.

Silpa Sadan, a centre for training villagers in various handicrafts in order to boost the rural economy, is in a way the nucleus of Sri Niketan. But for the past year, most of its units, including weaving, leatherwork, woodwork and batik have been gathering cobwebs. As the authorities could not meet the workers' financial demands, they struck work. Arun Mukhopadhyay, director of Sri Niketan, says: "We have been incurring huge losses and it was just not possible to pay anything extra to the workers."

Apart from Sri Niketan, Dutta had, on assuming office, put great emphasis on improvement of the Cheena Bhavan (centre for Chinese studies). But all this unique institution has received is a mounting lack of interest. There is only one librarian to look after 56,000 books and rare manuscripts on Buddhism and ancient Chinese culture. Security at the bhavan is appalling and it would be child's play for someone to walk away with the rare documents.

Recently, the Chinese Embassy proposed a students exchange programme. But while the Jawaharlal Nehru University made the best of the opportunity, Visva-Bharati has yet to respond.

Though the university gets an annual recurring grant of Rs 4 crore, apart from plan assistance, students complain of inadequate facilities. A number of them are upset that kitchens in certain hostels have been given to contractors. As one of them says: "Now we have to pay Rs 140 a month for food which even the dogs refuse to touch."

As usual, the accusing finger points to Vice-Chancellor Dutta, who seems to have the dubious distinction of having no friends on the campus. But whoever may or may not be responsible for specifics, the problem goes deeper. For through eight decades of reality, any ideal—however highly extolled or heavily subsidised—has a way of disappointing.

—SUMANTA SEN

TRIBALS

The Outcasts

"If I can free only one or two villages from the bonds of ignorance and weakness, there will be built, on a tiny scale, an ideal for the whole of India."—Rabindranath Tagore in the Visva-Bharati bulletin, December 1928.

Fifty-six years after they were penned, these words seem ironic. At least to the tribals of villages Kaliganj, Pearson Palli and Balipara.

While Tagore was alive, it was an accepted fact that the tribals—whose villages stand on Visva-Bharati land—would not only be left undisturbed, but would be the responsibility of Visva-Bharati in matters such as health, education and jobs at work-centres like Sri Niketan. They were free to graze their cattle on the vast open land on campus, and in natural calamities like drought it was to the Visva-Bharati that they turned for succour.

But today when they turn to the authorities, they come up against a blank wall. Last fortnight a contingent of villagers went to the administrative headquarters at Visva-Bharati demanding arrangements for water supply. Said Ganesh Marandi: "The babus listened to us and said they would try to do something, but also mentioned that they had monetary problems. Meantime, summer is on us and it will again mean months of struggling with only a little muddy water available in our dried-up pond."

What is particularly irritating to the villagers is that because they are within the Visva-Bharati campus, they are not entitled to state assistance as are villages that are run by panchayats. "During the 1982 drought, panchayati villagers got a lot of help from the Government. But while we suffered in the same way, we got nothing from either the Visva-Bharati or the Government," says Mistri Murmu, pointing to the science faculty building which, with gradual expansion, has almost entered his Kaliganj village. On the other side is the Ballavpur Reserve Forest, to which entry is forbidden, giving the hapless villagers a feeling of being trapped between the needs of modern education and ecology, which to them are totally irrelevant.

Their grazing ground has also been utilised for building teachers' quarters. So now, while the Kaliganj villagers have to take their cattle to distant Surul, the residents of Pearson Palli have totally given up grazing and have turned from farmers to rickshaw-pullers—in the process, inviting tuberculosis (TB). There is a TB patient in every second house and the disease continues to be a killer in these hamlets. Yet there is hardly any other occupation. Of the 300-odd villagers of Kaliganj, Pearson Palli and Balipara, only 14 have been given permanent employment at Visva-Bharati.



BIKASH DAS

A university building (left) on the outskirts of a tribal village: ending a tradition

When encephalitis attacked the villages last year, all they could do was to bring a *gunin* (a kind of witch-doctor) from adjoining Bankura district to drive away the plague. Said Murmu: "Doctors and medicine came much later, and only after the professor babus got scared of being affected and had complained to the hospital." While speaking of this callousness, the elderly peasant recalled the "last days of Rabindranath and his son, when we were treated with kindness".

Just a stone's throw from these wretched villages, stands Visva-Bharati in all its magnificent opulence. The only reaction from officials there was: "Well, we know that they live on our land and we are in some ways responsible for them. But it is not exactly clear as to what we are supposed to do for them." Clearly, attitudes have changed a great deal since the days of Rabindranath Tagore.

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SRI LANKA REBELS

Ominous Presence in Tamil Nadu

THREE kilometres down the road to Karaikal from the ancient Tamil Nadu town of Kumbakonam, a couple of hundred men occupying the makeshift camp have no time for passing traffic. Dressed in shorts, young men—often holding lathis—are intent on their drills and exercises. The uninitiated could easily mistake it for a typical RSS *shakha*.

But the locals know better. The odd one among them has had a glimpse of rifles being carried in bundles by the camp inmates who seem to be rather fond of leaving in small batches for long journeys. These are no ordinary excursions. The batches, led by seasoned guerrillas or retired Indian military officers, make for the obscure forests and wastelands along the coast in Ramanathapuram district. There, among the casuarinas, the real training and battle innoculation begins.

The vast, sparsely populated stretch along the coast has now become a veritable guerrilla area. But unlike the tribal bush-fighters in the North-east, their guns are not trained on India. Their target is Sri Lanka. Or more precisely, the northern Tamil majority region. Their objective: an independent, sovereign territory of Tamil Eelam.

In both geographic and strategic terms, they could not have chosen a better training ground. The terrain is the same as on their homeground and there is no need of simulation. In the words of a rebel leader: "The region is obscure, people and government sympathetic and our dreamland of Eelam right across the sea, just two hours by motorboat. Could we have found a better place?"

In fact, from Point Calimere which sticks out into the Indian Ocean like a dagger midway through the Ramanathapuram coast, Jaffna—the Tamil heartland in Sri Lanka—is just a little over an hour away in a good motorboat. And the rebels have plenty of these as is evident from the regular boat traffic between Jaffna and the Indian coast, running cargoes of guns and men.

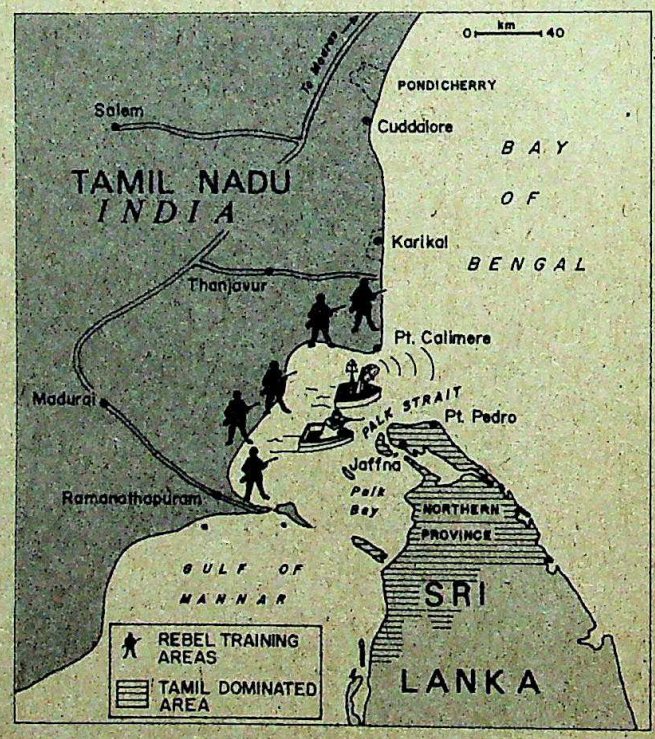
The camp near Kumbakonam, like the one close to Meenambakkam on the outskirts of Madras, is just one of the dozens set up by the Sri Lankan Tamil insurgents deep inside Tamil Nadu, where new recruits get ideological grounding by rebel theoreticians and elementary lessons in the use of firearms. Initial lessons over, they are split into small batches and sent for advanced training to the coast. Underground and Indian intelligence sources estimate that nearly 2,000 armed men, belonging to the various groups of Tamil insurgents, are now ready for battle.

Yet another 2,000–3,000 have been trained, but wait for arms shipments from "foreign sources", basically the Soviet-backed leftist guerrilla groups like the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Zimbabwean radicals. Armed with Kalashnikovs and G-3 rifles and driven by a strong emotion of ethnicity with a dash of left revolutionary fervour, they are keyed up to strike.

Inside Madras, the only thing not visible are the guns. But the city abounds with Sri Lankan Tamil insurgents of numerous denominations running training camps in the Tamil Nadu hinterland and plotting to force an armed showdown with the Government in Sri Lanka, scarred by repeated Sinhala-Tamil ethnic violence. The rebels, most of whom escaped by boats from Jaffna in the wake of the July 1983 massacres, are now all over Tamil Nadu. For their leaders, Madras has become a kind of tactical headquarters. They operate out of rooms in the legislators' hostel, allotted in the names of sympathetic MLA's and privately hired houses, while the Government is most accommodating about visa and immigration regulations—some of them even go abroad on Indian passports.

The desolate, unguarded coastline along the Ramanathapuram district in Tamil Nadu is their playground. Rebels of various groups run regular motorboat ferries between the Indian cost and Jaffna, using the Palk Straits unmolested. The Sri Lankan Navy has just six seaworthy gunboats which generally confine themselves to Trincomalee. Besides, the width of the Palk Straits is just about 35 km—the maritime boundaries overlap—and the Sri Lankans barely have a chance. The Indian Navy and Coast Guard, it seems, couldn't care less.

While the Government turns a Nelson's eye to the goings-on, the Sri Lankan rebels have also, in a way, helped resettle Indian Tamil ex-servicemen. A large number of them, particularly those who served in combat units, have been hired as instructors at the camps, and at higher salaries, in



For insurgents, there could not have been a better sanctuary. The local Tamil politician is sympathetic to the Sri Lankan Tamils and if ever the Central Government decided to disown them, it would raise a hornets' nest in the ethnically conscious state. With telephones, post office boxes and even colour calendars proclaiming their cause, they must be some of the queerest insurgents in the world.

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some cases, than they drew from the Indian Army. For insurgents, there could not have been a better sanctuary. The local Tamil politician is sympathetic towards the Sri Lankan Tamils and if ever the Central Government decided to disown them, it would raise a hornets' nest in the ethnically conscious state. With telephones, post office box numbers and even multi-page colour calendars proclaiming their cause, the Sri Lankan Tamils must be some of the queerest insurgents in the world. But there is no underestimating their capabilities and indications are that at least the Sri Lanka Government is not making that mistake.

Across the Palk Straits, the Sri Lanka Government is preparing to meet a full-scale, guerrilla conflagration. A strong indication is the posting to Jaffna last fortnight of Brigadier Nalin Seneviratne—a tough soldier—as the coordinating officer, with a brief to flush out the rebels. The Government also proposes to replace Devanesan Nessiah, a Tamil, with Sinhala Camillius Fernando, for "better coordination". The buildup is reflected in the arrest of five Eelam guerrillas, allegedly trained in India in "battlecraft, sabotage and marine commando warfare".

Even more tellingly, news came in of the killing, in quick succession, of at least six guerrillas by the recently formed anti-terrorist squads of the Sri Lanka Army. The feverish Sri Lankan efforts were part of a hurriedly prepared plan to meet the growing threat. The guerrillas have the potential to raise an underground army of about 5,000 in a few months. This could give gory expression to the long-standing secessionist spirit in the island state, heightened by the July 1983 riots in which thousands of Tamils were killed by armed Sinhala mobs, including mutinous soldiers.

THAT, indeed, was the turning point, when even those Tamils who had been sceptical of the prospects of secessionism began to take the rebellion more seriously. It was in a realistic appreciation of this growing menace that the Sri Lanka Government, after raising the bogey of Indian armed intervention the world over, sought Mrs Gandhi's assistance for a negotiated solution to the Tamil problem. India responded by assigning top-flight diplomat, G. Parthasarathi, to organise tripartite talks involving Jayewardene's United National Party (UNP), Mrs Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). But now, with the withdrawal of the SLFP, the talks are in the doldrums and even the pacifist minority among Tamil leaders are talking increasingly of extreme solutions.

Yet, while bank-heists and hit-and-run attacks are on the increase, the rebels do not

RAGHAVENDRA RAO



"We must unite now. For almost 18 months we were not even on talking terms. But now we have established contact with some of the Tigers."

—Uma Maheswaran, leader of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamileelam (PLOT)

SHEKHAR GUPTA



"India's security is linked to our liberation. So while India determines the politics, we play the role of the good soldiers."

—Sri Sabaratnam alias Tall Sri, leader of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO)

seem to want a frontal fight right away. With the intensification of guerrilla training and gun-running, they were in a hurry to complete the buildup before the Sri Lankan Government forced a showdown in order to draw them out while they were still ill-prepared and divided, or block conduits linking Jaffna with Tamil Nadu. The rebels were digging in, militarily and politically. Typical of their extreme leftist orientation, they wanted to do adequate political groundwork to create conditions where India could be forced to actively aid their campaign.

For the moment, the rebel strategy is to build up military strength while intensifying its propaganda war against not just the Sri Lanka Government but also the TULF and the round-table conference. "We couldn't care less about both the TULF and the Government," said rebel ideologue S. Ruthramoorthy, adding for effect: "The problem is the TULF are election-oriented while we are liberation-oriented."

Nothing symbolises this buildup better than the feverish activity in a small house in a corner of the upper middle class Mahalingapuram locality in Madras. There is no signboard that says so but almost everyone around knows that No. 9, Narayanan Street, houses the Tamil Information Centre and is run by the skinny, wiry figure of S. Sivanayagam, former editor of *Saturday Review*, the pro-Tamil weekly that the Sri Lanka Government banned in July 1983.

Sivanayagam leads a team of over a dozen men and women, mainly Tamil expatriates manning desks and typewriters churning out publicity material for distribution around the world. He sits in his first floor office, in constant touch with the leaders of various rebel groups. "We are neutral. This centre is the meeting point for everyone," he says pointing at the wall displaying the calendars of all the rebel groups.

But he is certainly not on the side of the pacifists and asserts: "The TULF are just chasing behind events. This is just a bid to sustain a fiction. They have caught the tiger by the tail." This pessimism has even seeped into the ranks of the TULF itself. V. Yogeswaran, former TULF MP morosely admitted, sitting in his Barnaby Avenue house in Madras: "The talks were never the same once the SLFP walked out. The whole wretched thing was written on water." With this cynicism almost total, Sri Lanka seems poised on the brink of a prolonged civil strife.

Gearing up for that eventuality are the highly indoctrinated men of over half-a-dozen organisations, with varying strengths in terms of arms and manpower. The more significant ones are:

► Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) better known as Tamil Tigers. This, the oldest, largest and militarily the most highly

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organised group, is led by 29-year-old Velupillai Prabhakaran and boasts of widespread foreign links.

► People's Liberation Organisation of Tamileelam (PLOT) is led by Uma Maheswaran, a former associate of Prabhakaran. Fairly large in terms of manpower, the group has a central core trained by the PLO.

► Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), which came to prominence in July 1983 when its chief, Thangathurai, and military commander, Kuttimani, were killed in the prison massacre. Now led by Sri Sabaratnam, known better by his nickname, "Tall Sri", TELO is a small but well-knit outfit.

► Tamil Eelam Army (TEA) is led by Thambipillai Maheswaran, a final-year engineering drop-out, educated in the United Kingdom. The relatively new and small organisation made a sensation last month with a Rs 50 million bank robbery at Kattankudy near Batticaloa last month.

► Eelam Research Organisation (EROS) is a London-based body of Trotskyite expatriates who originally provided ideological content and international contacts to the Tamil insurgency under the leadership of E. Ratnasabhapati.

► Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) is a body with pretensions more intellectual than military. Its more significant unit is the General Union of Eelam Students (GUES), which brings together Tamil students abroad.

► Tamil Eelam Liberation Army (TELA) is another small guerrilla organisation which now operates in conjunction with PLOT.

While the leaders of each organisation make various claims, intelligence and underground sources estimate their combined strength at around 5,000 —only one-third of which is armed at present. The bulk of the armed personnel belong to the "Tigers", followed by PLOT and then the others and the majority of them are based in India. Most organisations are left-oriented and have contacts with other leftist guerrilla organisations all over the world.

Both LTTE and PLOT have central fighting cores trained by the PLO. Says Balasingham of the Tigers: "Our basic alliance is still with the PLO. But we maintain active contact with the other groups like the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the African National Congress (ANC)."

THE PLO-Tamil nexus is even more marked in the case of PLOT. Its chief, Uma Maheswaran, was in the first batch to go for training to Lebanon in 1978. But after he split from the Tigers, he struck his own liaison with the People's Liberation Front for Palestine (PLFP), led by George Habash which, he claims, has been useful. But while PLOT still lays great store by Palestinian guerrilla training, the Tigers say they are having second thoughts. Said Balasingham: "The PLO-trained boys have not exactly proved to be an asset to our armed strength. Our terrain and conditions are different". The Tigers now claims to have developed their own training infrastructure.



RAGHAVENDRA RAO

"Silent support is hardly sufficient when the Sinhala Government is out to annihilate all the Tamils."

—Era Janarthanan,
former chief whip of the AIADMK

Besides the leftist organisations, which had traditionally been backed by the Soviet Union and Cuba, the Tamil rebels have also had some contact with the Irish Republican Army (IRA), even though they deny it. High level intelligence men, however, have evidence of the liaison and explain that the rebels' anxiety to deny it is because they do not want Scotland Yard on their campaigners' trail in the United Kingdom.

The guerrilla leaders also baulk at questions on direct help by foreign governments, particularly India. As Uma Maheswaran of PLOT evasively said: "Our independence has to be achieved by our own people. We are not dependent on the others. They (India) are allowing us to operate from here, that is good enough."

The foreign factor is not just confined to leftist guerrilla organisations. A significant role is being played in the buildup by the widespread net of Eelam bodies run by expatriate Tamils the world over, particularly in the UK—where there are over 30,000 of them— the US, Australia, West Germany and Canada.

The guerrillas are benefiting from the misplaced policy of the Sri Lankan Government to systematically downgrade the Tamil population by denying them jobs under a blatantly racial Sinhala Only Act. The law drove thousands of Tamils abroad in search of education and work. A bulk of them have taken asylum in West Germany and, though not very rich, form the hard core of the Eelam support overseas. "We expatriates are always aware of the problems back home," said S. Srinivasan, who teaches political science at the Adelaide University in Australia. He adds: "Sometimes I used to think it is easy for us, far away, to be radical . But each time I come back, I find people here more determined to achieve what they want."

The expatriates' most visible contribution is to propaganda. The rebel literature is slick and produced in expensive foreign presses. PLOT has even managed to obtain from its expatriate supporters a small transmitter which it operates from a boat off the Indian coast, making four-hour broadcasts every Saturday and Sunday in English, Tamil and Sinhala on the 41 meter band and varying the frequency between 7,000 and 7,125 megahertz to hoodwink the Government jamming experts. Often it is possible to monitor the broadcasts in parts of Tamil Nadu. It was this propaganda blitz organised basically by the expatriates that led President Jayewardene to say some time back that the "Tamils must be the world's strongest minority".

But the expatriate help is not confined to propaganda. A bulk of the money for the rebels' arms shoppers is also raised by Eelam supporters abroad. This, along with the PLO support, has enabled them to weld a spearhead armed with Kalashnikovs—the favourite assault rifle of leftist guerrilla outfits the world over—and NATO issue G-3 rifles, whose origin is shrouded in mystery. In all

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TAMIL STRUGGLE

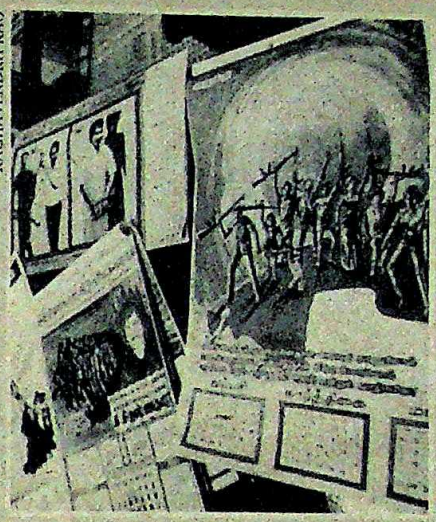
The Origins

SIX HUNDRED years before Christ, when Sri Lanka was an obscure island, sparsely inhabited by a sedate, peaceful population of Tamils an event of great significance took place. Prince Vijaya from Bihar invaded the island with his conquering armada. According to *Mahavamsa*, the Sinhala historical document, he liked the island, struck up a friendship with the daughter of a local chieftain and conquered the ill-organised local population. Says Tamil lawyer and rebel ideologue S.P. Ruthramoorthy: "Vijaya's first act was a genocide of the Tamils. He slaughtered thousands. Then he founded the Sinhala race and kingdom. So deep and old is our distrust of the Sinhala people."

For a 26-century history of ethnic distrust, the story of armed strife, surprisingly, seems rather short and of fairly recent origin. It began with the formation of the Tamil United Front (TUF) in May 14, 1972, when three parties joined hands at a meeting in the predominantly Tamilian port town of Trincomalee: the Federal Party, the Tamil Congress and Ceylon Workers Congress of Thondaman, a leader of Indian expatriate plantation workers. But to begin with, the TUF confined itself to an idea of autonomy within the Ceylonese entity.

The more radical ideas meanwhile were being propounded by the left-oriented Tamil Students Federation (TSF). Says an underground document tracing the growth of the secessionist movement: "The political structure of the TUF, founded on a conservative bourgeois ideology could not provide the basis for the articulation of the revolutionary politics... Confronted with this political vacuum and caught up in a revolutionary situation created by the concrete conditions of intolerable national oppression the Tamil revolutionary youth sought desperately to create a revolutionary political organisation to advance the task of national liberation."

Velupillai Prabhakaran was one such "revolutionary" youth who, in search of direct action formed a small organisation called Tamil New Tigers with the suggestive acronym of TNT. This was the precursor of the Tiger movement and, by and large, of all other insurgent organisations which came up later.



RAGHAVENDRA RAO

Propaganda material: expensive media war

After four years of ideological and political metamorphosis both the TNT and the TUF decided on a major change of strategy in May 1976. The TNT was renamed Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) backed now with a certain amount of armed strength. Similarly, at a national convention at Vaddokoddai in the Tamil region the TUF converted itself into the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and openly demanded creation of an independent sovereign Tamil Eelam. In fact in the 1977 general election the TULF manifesto sought popular mandate to "establish an independent, sovereign, secular, socialist state of Tamil Eelam that includes all the geographically contiguous areas that have been the traditional homelands of the Tamil-speaking people in this country".

The election led to a clear ethnic polarisation with the right-wing United National Party (UNP) of President Jayewardene winning 85 per cent of the seats in Parliament and the TULF with a handful of seats from the Tamil areas the only opposition. This was reflected in racial riots immediately afterwards resulting in the deaths of a large numer of Tamils, the destruction of property and in driving more Tamil youth to insurgency. The "Tigers" had by now established training camps.

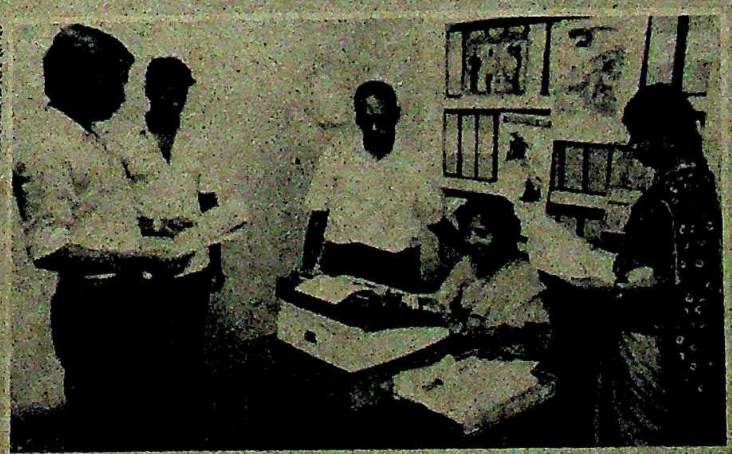
On April 7, 1978 a police party led by an Inspector Bastiampillai organised an ambush on a Tiger training camp but was caught in a counter-ambush organised by "Lieutenant" Chelvanayagam. The Tigers killed four policemen, including the inspector and captured their weapons. This marked the beginning of ethnic insurgency in Sri Lanka. Exactly five months later, as Jayewardene introduced a new Constitution giving him omnibus powers the Tigers delivered their second blow by burning Air Ceylon's Avro airliner at Jaffna Airport.

This was followed by frequent hit-and-run attacks forcing the Government to promulgate the widely criticised Prevention of Terrorism Act under which the armed forces were given additional powers. In the following months, the rebel strength increased despite strong counter-measures by the Government aided, in no small measure, by the frequent racial riots which increasingly drove the Tamil population to the wall.

But in the process the Tigers organisation too underwent several changes. Many factions broke away and organised themselves into new groups with the same objectives but often working at cross-purposes.

While most of the groups are at the moment running training camps on Indian soil, the Tigers (LTTE) are perhaps the only ones active on Sri Lankan soil. But even the staunchest of the rebel supporters admit that the Tigers have no chance against government forces as long as the various groups operate independently of each other. With the prospects of unity among them still elusive all the rebel groups are, at the moment, caught in a wait-and-watch situation. As Tigers theoretician A.S. Balasingham said: "We are in no great rush to strike. We are not just going to attack without any planning. It will have to be a very well-coordinated war strategy. Without that there will be no final assault."

With all the groups basically keen on unity that may not exactly be a distant possibility. Once it is realised there will be no stopping a long-drawn-out guerrilla war in the Tamil-dominated northern Sri Lanka.



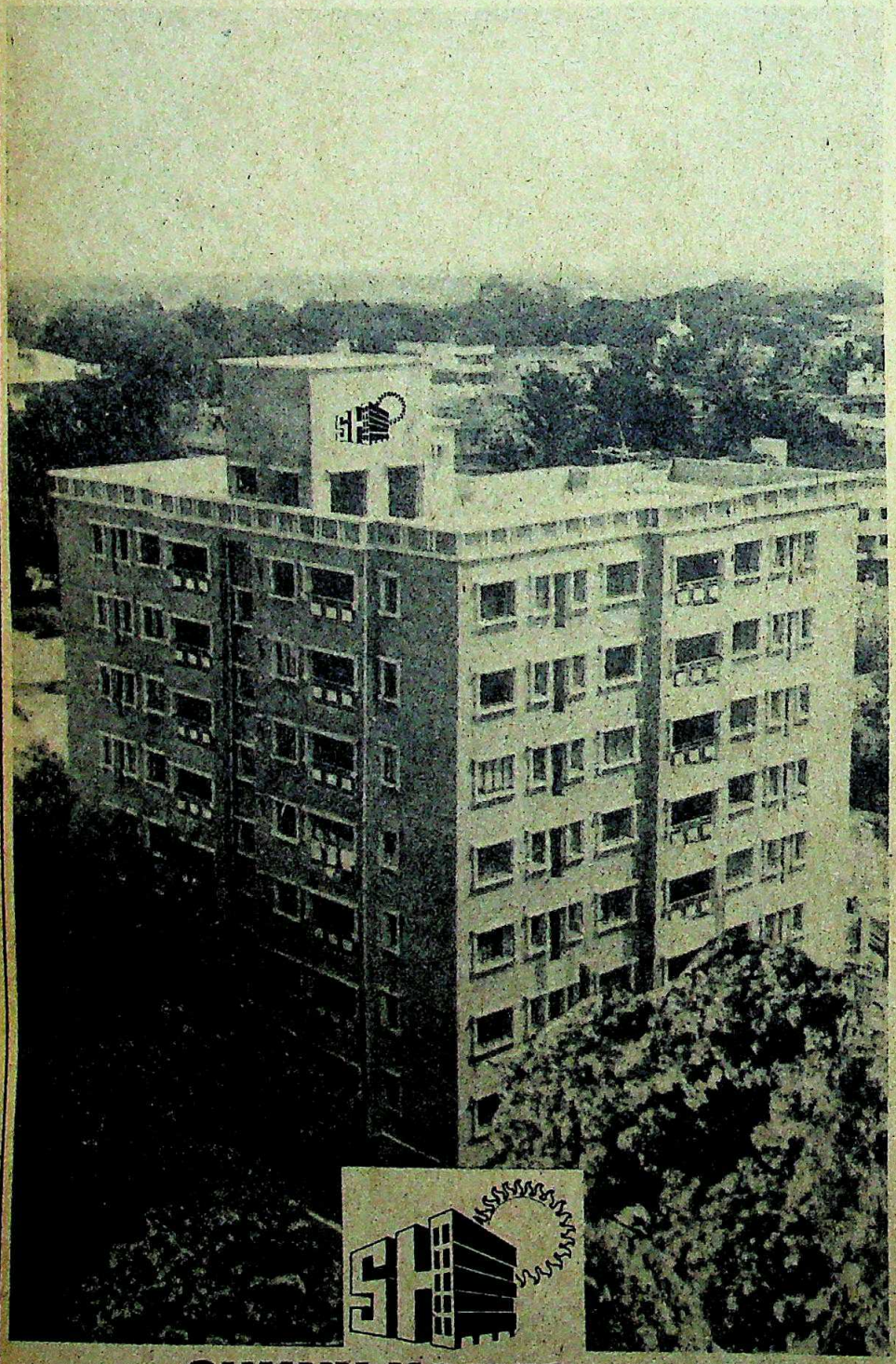
RAGHAVENDRA RAO

Workers at the information centre at Madras: highly organised

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likelihood, the latter were bought from mercenary arms dealers in Europe. Besides, the guerrillas have generous supplies of Sten machine-carbines, hand-guns and grenades.

But more important than the arithmetic of their current armed strength is the sense of commitment to the Eelam cause. Obviously, these are not merely paper tigers as is evident from their frequent armed strikes, one of which—by the Tigers in July 1983—lit the spark for the ethnic riots. Besides, most of the leaders escaped in jail-breaks following the killings and have shown the inclination to fight on.

The Tigers ideologue, Parmanandan Nesan, claimed: "We even carry cyanide pills to commit suicide when there is no escape. None of our people have ever been caught." While that is still a claim that cannot be verified, the guerrilla outfits are full of people like TELO chief Sri Sabaratnam alias Tall Sri, who has a price of Rs 2 lakh on his head—he managed to escape while serving a life sentence for participation in a guerrilla raid. His brother, Kandaswamy is still held hostage in a Sri Lanka prison. The PLOT publicity in-charge, Shirley Skantha, claims: "Armed training is on now and we are very close to our target of 5,000 armed men. Taking over power is no problem now. But we think in terms of mass mobilisation and crippling the state."

But, for all the claims, the lack of action in the recent past arouses suspicions about their real capability. The rebels explain it away, saying that it is vital for them to buy time. Besides, they argue, they were worried about the possibility of reprisals against the Tamil refugees in camps near Colombo. But a more likely explanation is that they are realistic enough to know that there will be no taking on the Government as long as they do not achieve a measure of unity among themselves. In the past, the groups have bitterly fought each other, even killed each other's men, provoking a senior Tamil Nadu police officer to remark: "The problem is they have nothing in common except for a craving for fancy acronyms for their organisations and their leftist orientation."

But now the rebels themselves are desperate to reach some kind of unity and put an end to internecine blood-letting. Said Balasingham: "Centralised military command is what we are looking for. It is a vital aim and will be achieved." The PLOT chief Uma Maheswaran, who in June 1982 escaped an assassination attempt by the Tigers chief Prabhakaran in Madras, displays even more keenness for unity. He pleads: "We must unite now. We are trying. For almost 18 months we were not even on talking terms. But now we have established contact with some representatives of the Tigers." Unity in fact is one aim on which all rebel leaders agree. Asserted Tall Sri: "We must not bother about ideology now. We must unite. It is a *sine qua non*."

BUT PROSPECTS for unity are obstructed by various predilections, personal as well as ideological. The Tigers are in no mood to forgive Uma Maheswaran for his alleged indiscretions while he was with them or for his breaking away. In the past, they have also indulged in vendetta killings against members of other organisations and even now do not rule it out. Asserted a deadpan Parmanandan Nesan, a Tigers spokesman: "Our task is not merely fighting the Sinhala army. Eliminating robbers and hardcore thieves is also our job."



Tamil Tigers leader Prabhakaran in Jaffna: extreme militancy

A determined unity effort has been launched by some young TULF leaders, backed by expatriate Tamils and some local leaders, particularly from the DMK. For them, the stumbling block will finally be the Tigers-PLOT enmity, evident in Balasingham's assertion that the Tigers "will have nothing to do with anything that embarrasses the Government of India, like running a clandestine transmitter from Indian soil". The reference is obviously to the PLOT venture.

In sheer military terms, if the rebel organisations achieve some degree of unity, the Sri Lanka Army will find them a tough proposition. Defence experts say that if the Sri Lankan rebels are able to muster 6,000–7,000 armed men against the Sri Lanka Army's strength of a meagre 11,000, only super power intervention could prevent them from taking Eelam. Claimed Balasingham: "In any case, they will not have all their army spare to fight us. We can create conditions in the south (which has a Sinhala majority) to keep them tied down there."

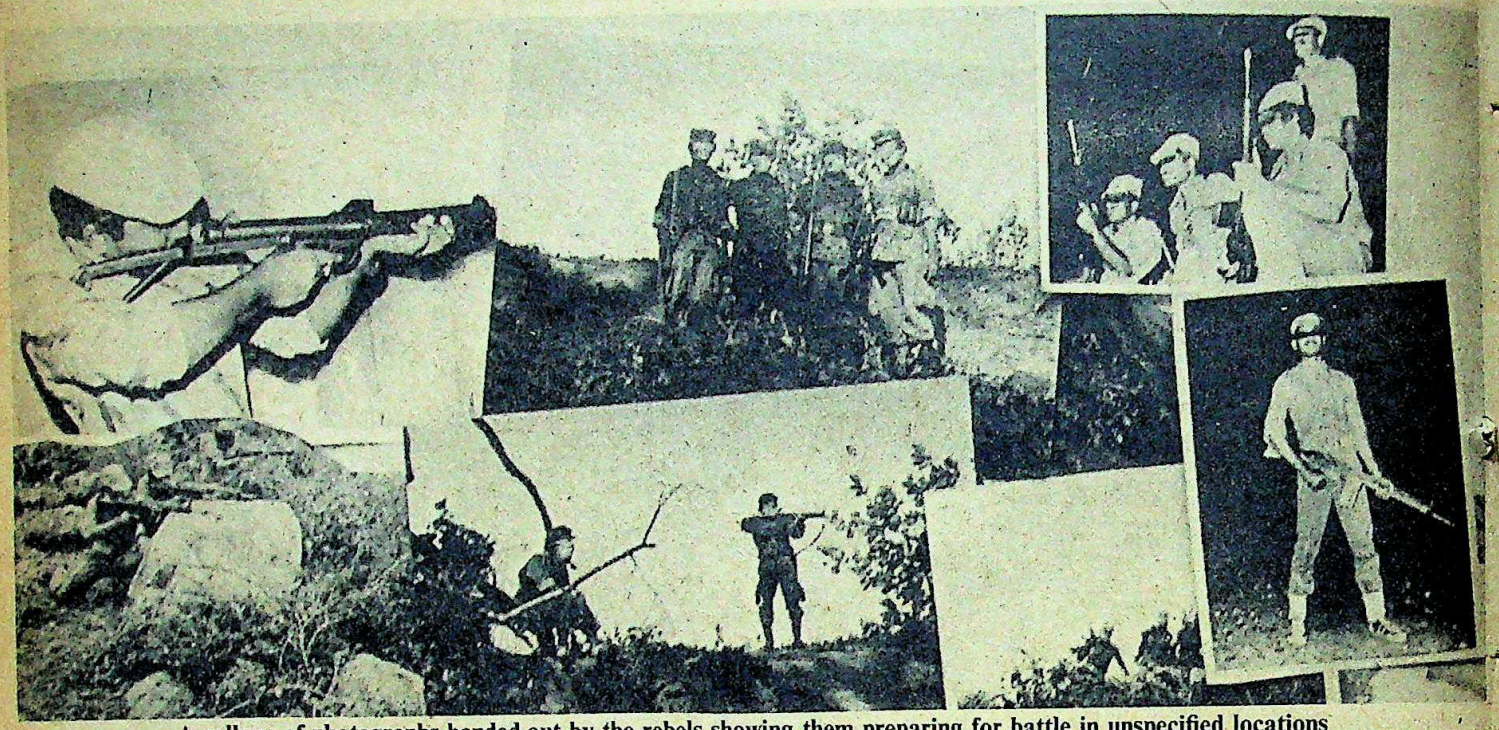
Obviously, even the Sri Lankan Government is not underestimating the rebel threat. Nor is it in a mood to throw in the towel without fighting. Defence sources confirm that a batch of Sri Lankan officers were recently sent to Malaysia for training in counter insurgency and jungle warfare. In the past, Sri Lankan officers have been trained in British academies. Of late, there has been evidence of the British Army's ultra-elite Special Air Service (SAS) commandos training the Sri Lankans.

The Government is procuring more and faster gunboats from China to effectively patrol the Palk Straits. Old, discarded armoured cars too are being sought from the Pakistani Army, which may not be of much use in the plains of Punjab but would present a daunting challenge in the Jaffna bush. Besides, the Government is rearming the troops with American M-16 rifles, some of which are provided with Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPG's).

Interestingly, the desperate search for arms and training has sent both the guerrillas and the Sri Lanka Government shopping in the British mercenary markets, which have been regular suppliers to the African and Latin American guerrilla groups. For the guerrillas, the quest led to the hiring, instead, of a sizeable number of retired

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A collage of photographs handed out by the rebels showing them preparing for battle in unspecified locations

Indian Army, Navy and BSF officers who have been training rebels. The Indian intelligence agencies have a list of such officers, some of whom have been half-heartedly warned to stay clear.

THE GUERRILLAS await with anxiety President Jayewardene's visit to the US in June. There is speculation that he will ask for a substantial arms aid to equip the 6,000 new recruits that will raise his army's strength by 50 per cent. The rebels attach great importance to US Defence Secretary Caspar Weinberger's recent visit to Sri Lanka, though the Government dismisses the visit as routine. "What matters of strategy could he have discussed with Weinberger in just 30 minutes, that too without aides?" asked a government spokesman.

The question, however, is what will Jayewardene give the West in return? The guerrilla ideologues say, and many in South Block agree, that it can be nothing but Trincomalee, one of the world's finest natural harbours perched strategically in the Indian Ocean. Somehow this suspicion persists despite denials by the Sri Lanka Government and US State Department spokesmen.

This also makes India's foreign policy planners so deeply involved in Sri Lankan affairs. Obviously, this is the coordinate along which the rebels are working in their quest for more direct help from India. As Sabaratnam said: "India's security is linked to our liberation. So while India determines the politics we play the role of the good soldiers." Western media reports that the Sri Lanka Government is building refuelling facilities for the US Navy at Trincomalee have bolstered the rebels' position.

Besides the Trincomalee question, Indian compulsions are also shaped by regional politics. The Sri Lankan Tamils have strong popular sympathy in Tamil Nadu. This puts the MGR Government in a fix. DMK President M. Karunanidhi has identified totally with the Sri Lanka Tamil cause.

MGR thus has no choice but to be soft towards the rebels, an approach transparently visible in his setting both Uma Maheswaran and Prabhakaran free from criminal charges and allowing all rebels to freely operate from Tamil Nadu. He also pressurised the Centre to issue Indian passports to some of the important rebel leaders. The most prominent among them is Uma Maheswaran, who recently visited Mauritius carrying a temporary Indian passport.

Yet MGR is under fire for not doing enough for the rebels. Even his party's chief whip, Era Janarthanan, has resigned in protest against the Government's "vague" policy towards the Sri Lankan Tamil cause. He says: "Silent support is hardly sufficient when the Sinhala Government is out to annihilate all the Tamils." Normally a politician known more for his capacity to make noise than for concrete action, Janarthanan surprised the diplomatic world in December by organising a world Tamil conference in Madras which was attended, among others, by Lim Kit Siang, an ethnic Chinese and leader of Malaysia's powerful Democratic Action Party. It is no secret that the Sri Lankan Tamils are being actively supported by the ethnic Tamil pressure groups in countries like Malaysia and Mauritius.

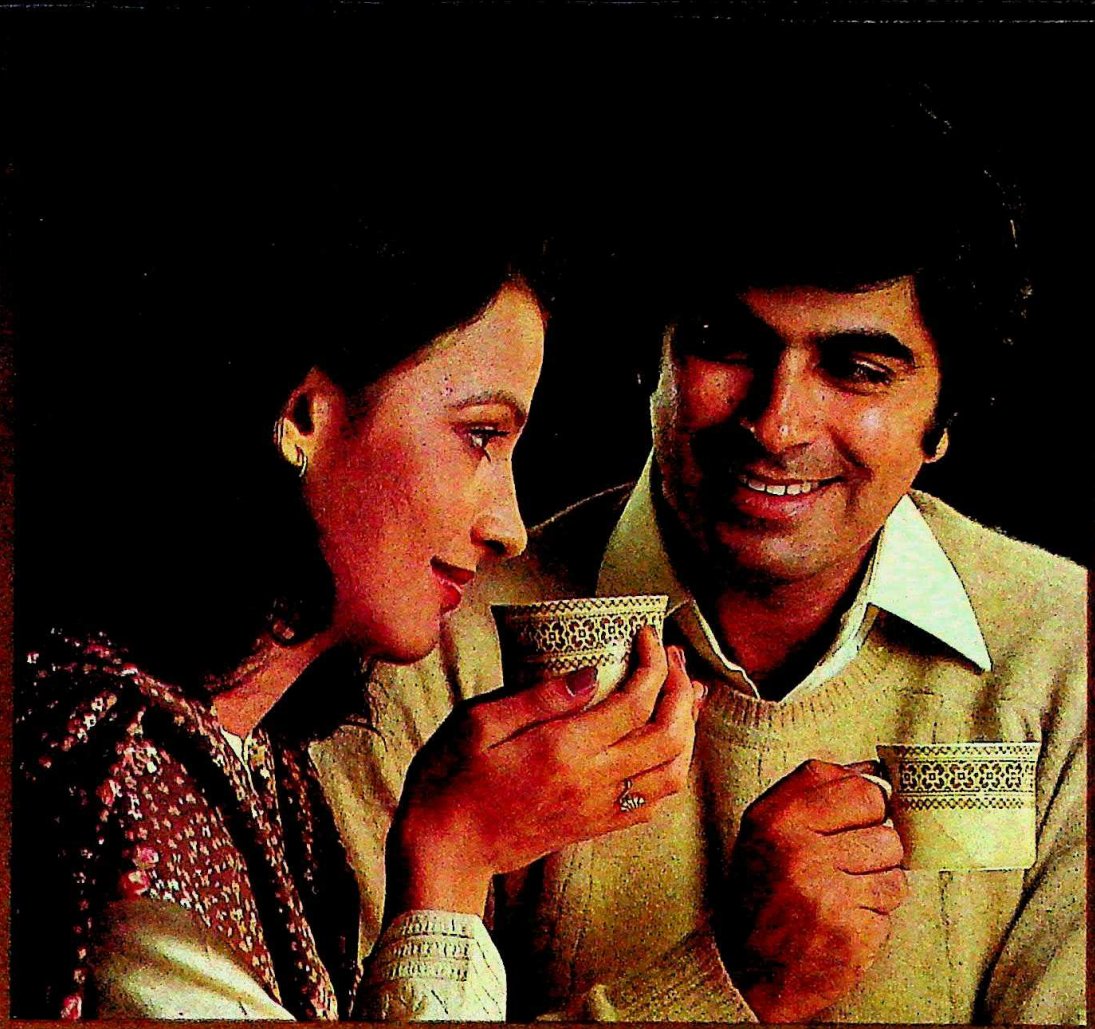
For the Indian Government, ethnic pressures are hard to ignore, although M.M.K Wali, Union home secretary declined to comment on the situation, saying that "the Home Ministry really has nothing to say on this". The Congress(I) has to face widespread propaganda in Tamil Nadu that while Mrs Gandhi used force so effectively to save Bengalis persecuted by the Pakistanis in 1971, she is now insensitive to Tamil suffering. That leaves South Block on the horns of a dilemma. If they throw out the Sri Lankan Tamils, the Centre loses face in Tamil Nadu. If they don't and continue to ignore their presence, Sri Lanka will continue to embarrass India in international forums. Even last fortnight, Prime Minister R. Premadasa told the Sri Lankan Parliament: "Tamil youths are being given terrorist training in Madras and other parts of south India. What would be the position if the Sikhs came to Sri Lanka to train in terrorism and fight for secession?"

Ideally, the way out still lies in a negotiated settlement which guarantees protection of Tamil interests under a system where they have the same rights as the Sinhalas. But as long as ethnic chauvinism holds sway, any regime that makes such a concession to the Tamils may not surrive.

The troubled island republic seems to be in for a long spell of unrest. In the words of Vettivelu Yogeswaran: "Ceylon, actually, has no future. At best we will be the Lebanon of Asia." That is the last prospect India would want to have 25 km from its shores.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Madras

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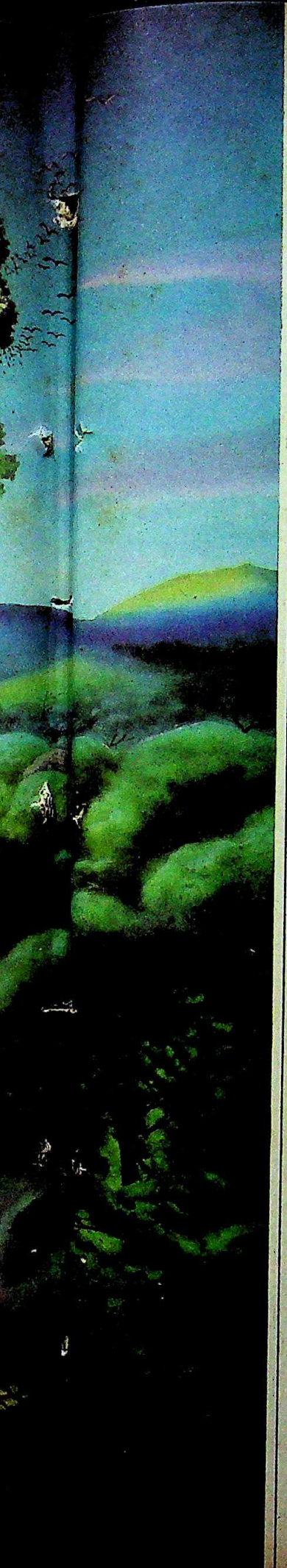
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NARCOTICS

Asian Alarm



PAKISTAN has emerged as the most significant heroin threat to the western world. The illicit production, conversion and trafficking of narcotics by that country has taken astronomical strides. According to recent estimates by the United States Drug Enforcement Agency, South-west Asian heroin—the bulk of it originating in Pakistan—now accounts for 51 per cent of the total supply reaching the US. Only four years ago Pakistani heroin accounted for no more than 3 per cent of the total imports to the US.

This trend has caused such serious alarm in the US Congress that the legislators despatched a special Congressional delegation, headed by Senator Paula Hawkins, last month to Pakistan to extract promises on the heroin issue from the Pakistani Government. Hawkins is the author of a legislation stipulating that American aid be reduced to countries that refuse to cooperate with the United States' drug control programme. Pakistan is currently on the receiving end of a multi-billion dollar economic and arms aid package from Uncle Sam.

So President Zia, naturally, did an obsequious back-bend to accommodate the visiting American delegation. Not only did he personally meet his American visitors but he also trotted out Mairaj Hussain, chairman of Pakistan's Narcotics Control Board; Roedad Khan, interior minister; Abdul Sattar, acting foreign secretary and members of the Federal Advisory Council to promise full cooperation.

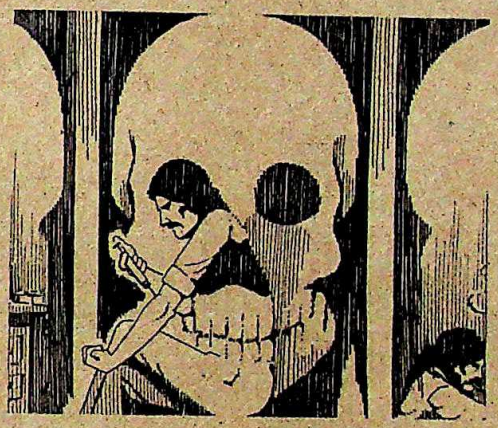
According to members of the American delegation, President Zia and his officials promised the Congressional investigators everything but the moon. Pakistan would welcome the posting of additional US Customs and Drug Enforcement Agency agents in Karachi and Lahore—the two cities from where the drug is shipped out; and the Government would crack down on heroin refineries and money laundering banks identified by the American intelligence agents. US agents have already supplied a list of 21 flourishing heroin laboratories to the Pakistani authorities.

Senator Hawkins and her colleagues were even given a VIP tour of the Gadoon Project where the Zia Government has promised to enforce a ban on opium cultivation this year along with similar bans later on in other regions of the north-west frontier. And Zia told the American visitors that the main reason for the increase in heroin trafficking was the use by the Soviets of Afghanistan as a partner to promote drug trafficking to the western world.

Zia may have been perfectly honest in expressing his concern over the flow of narcotics. Shocking new statistics compiled by western intelligence source shows that heroin addiction in Pakistan now afflicts more than one lakh young people. It was virtually negligible in 1980. But Zia's promises to the American delegation are easier made than carried out. There are several reliable reports, known to the State Department, that high-level Pakistan officials who wield considerable influence in the Government, as well as Pakistan International Airlines are up to their elbows in the profitable dope traffic and will resist any attempt to place a damper on their lucrative industry.

The Congressional delegation visited not only Pakistan but also descended on other South Asian drug capitals as well in its urgent quest for methods to reverse a trade which was once the white man's most profitable monopoly in the opium dens of China. The chickens —or reefers as the case might be—have come home to roost, and with devastating results.

A recent Congressional report stated bluntly that no threat "strikes America more savagely and frequently than illegal narcotics. Its deadly impact is felt in failed education, violent crime, weakened national security, reduced productivity, addiction, and death." Every American community, in one way or another, has been plagued by the scourge of drugs. Ninety per cent of illegal drugs consumed in the US comes from abroad. The trafficking is now estimated to be a $ 100 billion industry.



There are several reliable reports that high-level Pakistan officials who wield considerable influence in the Government as well as Pakistan International Airways are up to their elbows in the profitable dope traffic and will resist any attempt to put a damper on their lucrative industry.

Families and schools have been corroded by drug use. One out of every three high school students experiments with dangerous drugs. Drug related crimes are up. In Miami, Florida, the port of entry for 80 per cent of marijuana and cocaine, there were 535 murders in 1981, nearly half of them committed by machine-guns in mafia-style executions. The drug enforcement administration says that state and local law enforcement personnel have been outspent, outmanned, and outgunned by drug traffickers.

One of the most surprising findings that emerged from the recent Congressional hearings was that almost all the illegal methaqualone used in the US was produced in the Peoples Republic of China. And nearly all teenagers who were suspected and then arrested for drunk driving last year in parts of Florida were found also to be under the influence of this drug.

The Congressional delegation also visited Turkey, Thailand, Burma, and Hong Kong during its anti-drug crusade. Here are details from an internal, firsthand account of these visits.

► The Government of Thailand proved to be recalcitrant in enforcing narcotics law even though Thailand has more than 5 lakh addicts. The Americans urged the Thai Government to seize the financial and property assets purchased through narcotics profits, crack down on opium and marijuana production and improve customs operations but the Thais remained unmoved.

The officials have promised for several years to destroy opium crops but have not done so. It is a profitable occupation and no substitute crop has so far been successfully cultivated. And despite considerable US arm-twisting, the Thais have rejected the use of herbicides in spraying poppy fields. Thai officials were invited last year by the Administration to observe joint US-Mexican spraying of marijuana fields but remained unimpressed.

The Congress is expected to look askance at Thailand when it considers its South Asian ally's next aid package. The visiting delegation was critical not only of Thailand but of their ambassador to that

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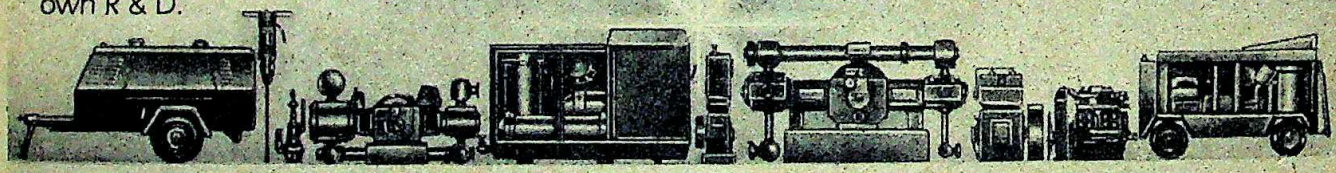
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country. "The ambassador to Thailand has failed to establish drug control as an urgent priority in US-Thailand relations and communicate to the Thai leadership US public concern over Thai opium production, refining and trafficking," one report to Congress noted.

► Burma's efforts to control drug trafficking, surprisingly, impressed the Congressional investigators. The Burmese Government agreed to consider air herbicidal spraying of opium fields with US assistance, and agreed to work with the US drug enforcement and customs officials.

As one of the key opium growing states in South-east Asia Burma has just produced a bumper crop of 500 tonnes that will gradually wind up in the West. This is an almost five-fold increase over the past three drought-stricken years. Most of the crop grows in the Shan state in virtually inaccessible mountainous and jungle terrain inhabited by terrorists and armed insurgents.

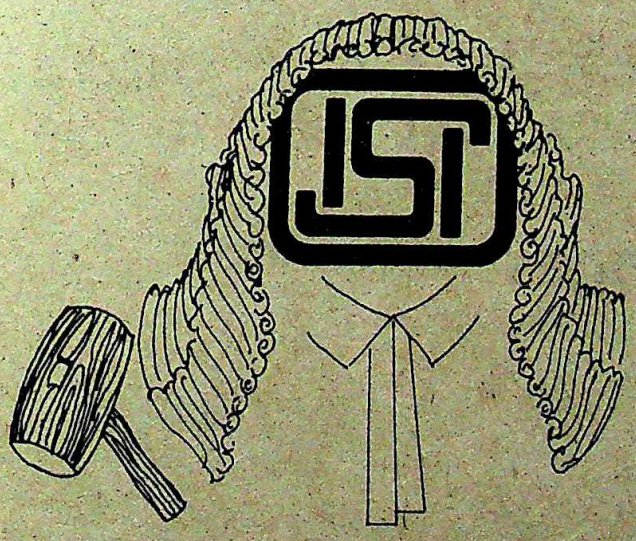
Burma is also considered to be the prime location for highly mobile factories that process South Asian opium into heroin. The "Golden Triangle" refineries are situated within a few miles of the Thai border. The Burmese Communist Party (BCP) controls most of the trafficking and production in the Shan state.

The US Government has had a clandestine aviation programme in Burma since 1974. America has provided Burma helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft, communications equipment and maintenance support. The current programme includes 29 aircraft and Burmese maintenance "is considered the best in South-east Asia". Because of Burma's willingness to join the drug fight, the US Congress will recommend that the US Government help Burma buy two C-130 H transport aircraft at concessional rates.

► There are some success stories. Hong Kong continues to be the region's money laundering capital. Money obtained through illegal drug transfers is "laundered" through property transactions, reinvestments, wire transfers, and the banking system. The colony's laissez-faire business atmosphere "makes it extremely difficult to determine which funds used by criminals are legitimate and which are derived from illegal means. Traffickers often quickly reinvest drug proceeds through Hong Kong's financial institutions," says one report. Nevertheless, through measures such as establishing a central registry of drug addicts, treatment programmes, and anti-drug media blitzes, Hong Kong has reduced its addicts from one lakh in 1973 to one-third that number.

► The success of interdiction and drug control is best evident in Turkey. Under unremitting US pressure, Turkey, once the major source of opium and heroin production, has been able to limit its production to legal opiates produced in the form of poppy straw. But Turkey still continues to be a transit country for drugs headed toward Europe and the US. Turkey now has about 70,000 tonnes of poppy capsules in stockpile. Of this amount about 50,000 tonnes are stored in a protected area while the rest is buried in the ground.

Meanwhile the US Government is also encouraging a concerted multilateral effort to curb illegal dope trafficking. This is because multilateral organisations can act in major drug producing countries such as Iran and Afghanistan where US bilateral efforts would be impossible. The American Administration officials are predicting that while the US may withdraw from United Nations agencies such as UNESCO it will pay more attention in the future to the financial health of relatively obscure agencies such as the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC). The agency recently received a $41 million pledge from the Government of Italy. The US is expected to take the lead in urging other developed nations facing drug problems to contribute generously to UNFDAC.



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Newfields

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MADHYA PRADESH

Fraud in the Forest

THE FRAUD has been going on for more than two decades. There are no estimates to indicate its size or volume, but it is known for certain that millions of trees have been cut and villagers—predominantly tribals—have been swindled out of crores of rupees by contractors, officials and politicians who have fattened on the spoils.

In the hilly and forested areas of Madhya Pradesh, villagers have always had trees—teak, sal, bija and others—on their agricultural land. Through the '60s, '70s and then the '80s as the prices of timber soared, these farmers were sitting on property that could be valued in the thousands, and in some cases, lakhs of rupees.

But, cut off from the outside world, they knew nothing of the potential wealth that their trees represented. The trees were sold at throw-away prices and everyone involved—except, of course, the villager—made his fortune. That there were laws to prevent precisely this from happening did not make much difference because the stakes were too high, the nexus of forces against the villagers too strong.

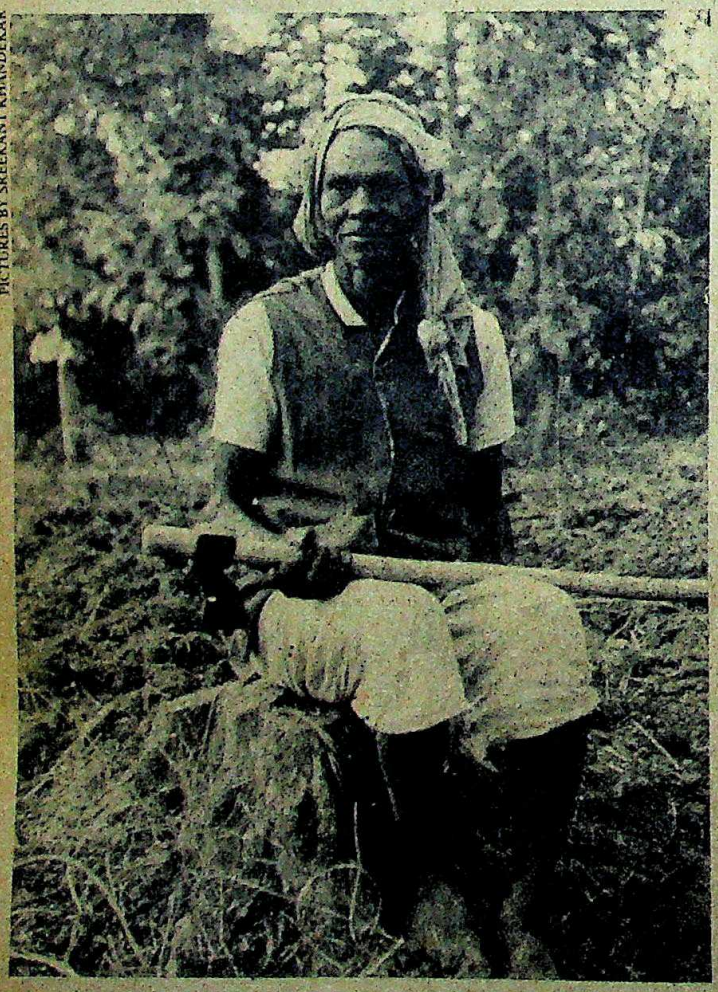
Bhopal Correspondent SREEKANT KHANDEKAR *recently spent a week travelling through Mandla, Seoni and Chhindwara, three typical forested districts of Madhya Pradesh that have regularly witnessed loot, plunder and cheating. His report:*

OUTSIDE, a crowd lazed in the sunshine of a winter afternoon. But in the small, shabby and rather crowded court room, there was tension. The young collector leaned forward in his chair and glared down at the five villagers standing in front of him. "Don't tell me that you want to cut the trees so that you can cultivate better. I know some forest contractor has persuaded you to apply for my permission. Isn't that the truth?" he demanded.

The men squirmed but said more or less in unison: "No sahib, we want to cut them ourselves. There is no contractor." "Don't lie," the collector snapped. "How much is he paying you? Rs 20 per tree? Rs 22?" Suddenly he changed his line of questioning. "Your village is 100 km from here. Who brought you here? The contractor?"

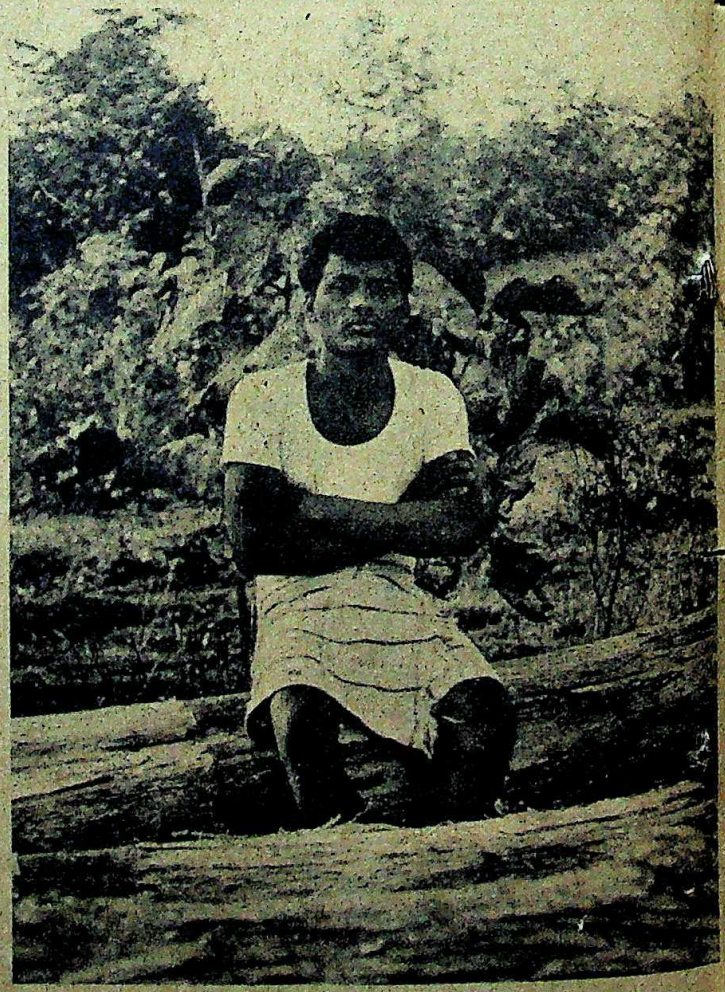
"No sahib, we came ourselves by bus," replied one.

PICTURES BY SREEKANT KHANDEKAR



"It never occurred to me that the trees were worth more. Even if it had, who could I have possibly checked with? Who would bother to tell me?"

—Nanhu, a Gond



Balesh Das's family sold 34 teak trees for Rs 225—still not a very good price but better than most—simply because the then collector insisted on it.

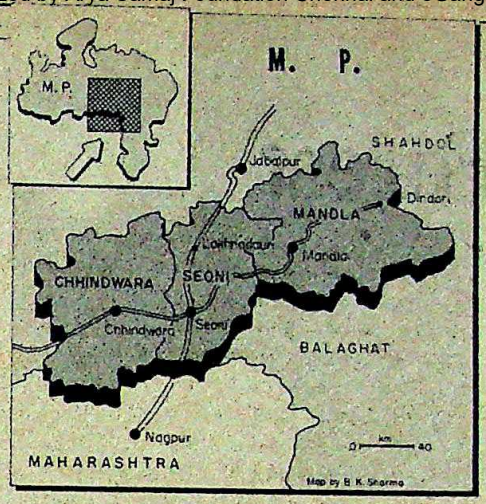
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"Don't lie," the collector repeated angrily. "I know you don't have the money to make the trip here. You there," he said, pointing to one of the five, an old, infirm man in tatters who could barely stand. "Turn your pockets inside out. Let me see if you have money for your bus fare back." The old man reluctantly did as he was told: he had no money.

The sparring went on for 20 minutes, the villagers stubbornly denying any contractor's involvement although they were clearly scared by the collector's wrath. Finally, exasperated, he told them: "I'm now going to make you speak on oath, with your hand on the Bhagavad Gita. If you lie now, you are going to be in serious trouble."

When the court reader appeared with the Gita, the villagers were terrified and one of them blurted out: "Forgive us, sahib. He paid us Rs 20 per tree."



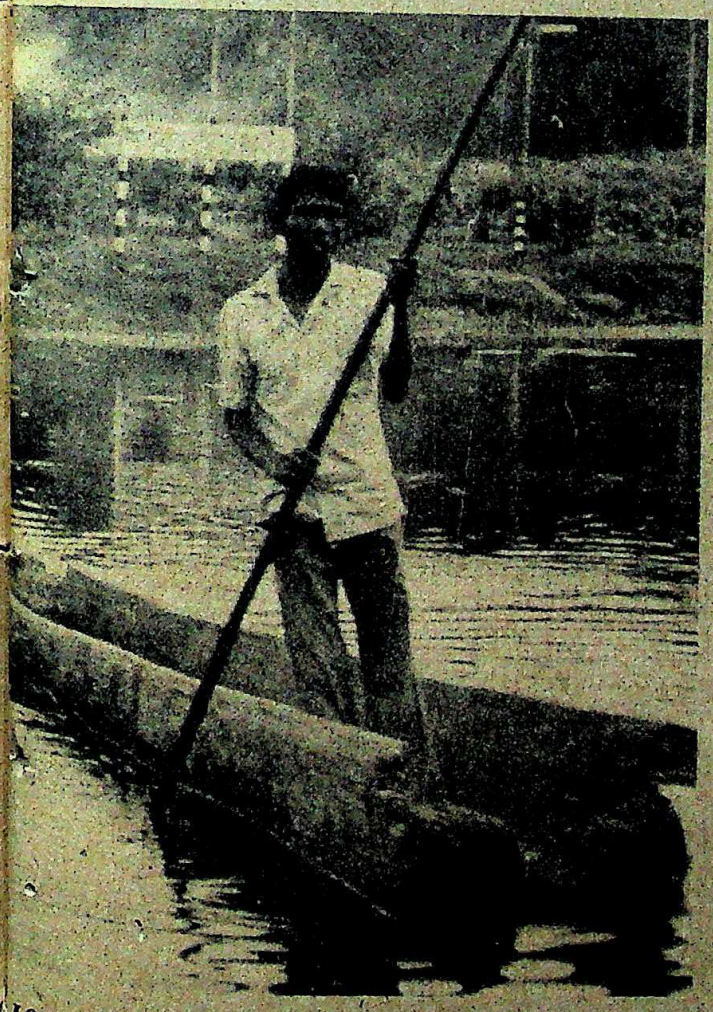
The collector sank back in his chair: "Why don't your people understand that we are trying to help you? Do you realise that each of those *sagaun* (teak) trees you have contracted to sell for Rs 20 is probably worth Rs 2,000?"

If permission had been granted that afternoon last month in Seoni, 792 teak trees would have been sentenced for execution. Trees worth anywhere between Rs 10 lakh and Rs 20 lakh would have been sold for less than Rs 16,000.

Ajmer, the old man, Ramdayal and Umer, all Gonds, and Khuman and Shobharam, both Ahirs, are residents of Kosamghar, a village in Lakhnadaun tehsil of Seoni district. The offer of Rs 20 was made by a local trader and they assumed it was fair.

"Not a single person in the village is literate," says Khuman, a very voluble man. "In fact none of us can even count properly. When you are as illiterate as we are, you have to trust someone. And we trusted that trader." Khuman, owner of 181 teak trees, is still amazed that they would be valued conservatively at at least Rs 2 lakh.

Although the bulk of such trees on pri-



If Udaylal, a Gond, had got the market price for his timber, the bank interest alone would have brought thrice as much as he and his wife together earn.



Khemsi, who put his thumb impression on several papers that he didn't understand —possibly including a bank cheque—got nothing for his trees.

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vate (revenue) lands have fallen to the axe over the years state-wide, many still remain. M.P. Rajan, 32, says that as Seoni's collector for the last six months, he has already turned down permission for the felling of at least 50,000 trees. But on closer questioning he also admits that in four years up to mid-1983, more than 100,000 trees were signed away in this district. Most of them were teak, a species still found in abundance in these tracts.

Just one among the hundreds of farmers who own these trees is 28-year-old Udaylal, a Gond from Mitawani, a village 35 km from Seoni. Just over a year ago, says Udaylal, he sold 200 trees, nearly all of them teak, for Rs 1,500—or Rs 7.50 per tree. Even today he doesn't know that he has been swindled. He and his wife work on daily wages in a Forest Department nursery, but if he had got the market price for his timber, the bank interest on that alone would have given them thrice as much as the two of them together earn.

It is not as if the Government has been powerless to stop the exploitation. Sections 240 and 241 of the Madhya Pradesh Land Revenue Code give wide powers to the collector as does the Madhya Pradesh Protection of Aboriginal (Interest in Trees) Act of 1956. Not a single tree on these private lands can be cut without the collector's approval.

Moreover, the act clearly makes the collector responsible for ensuring that where tribals' lands are involved—which is in most cases—the price for trees is fair and that the payment is made in the collector's presence. Any violation of this act can land a contractor in jail for up to six months. But this 28-year-old act is rarely taken notice of.

Over time, the entire operation has developed into a well-oiled machine. Contractors know precisely which palm to grease. It is estimated that on an average, bribes of between Rs 25 and Rs 50 per tree are paid, depending on the circumstances and the kind of timber.

The extent of corruption is not surprising, considering the profits involved. Today, in log form, one cu m of grade one teak can fetch Rs 3,500 to Rs 4,000 in major markets in Madhya Pradesh and one cu m of sawn grade one teak fetches Rs 6,000 to Rs 7,000.

The process goes something like this: the contractor approaches the farmer, either directly or through an intermediary and suggests that he can help the farmer get rid of his trees so that he can cultivate his fields better. What is more, he impresses upon the illiterate farmer, he will pay him good money. To those brought up in poverty, the promise of a few hundred rupees—or a few thousand—is very tempting.

The patwari is persuaded to demarcate the farmer's holdings—a tedious process—and list every single tree, listing the species and the girth. The patwari is at times bribed so that he exaggerates the size of the holding on paper, so that trees from neighbouring forest land are also included. The list is then countersigned by a revenue inspector or tehsildar.

Following this, the subdivisional officer (SDO) makes a recommendation after studying the local situation: for instance, there is a rule prohibiting chopping of trees on sloping land since this might lead to erosion. After this, the divisional forest officer makes his comments and only then does the collector arrive at a decision. If he approves, the trees are cut—on paper, by the farmer; but actually by the contractor.

Under the Madhya Pradesh Van Upaj (Vyapar Viniyaman) Adhiniyam of 1969—popularly called the Forest Nationalisation Act—the Forest Department has the first right of purchase on specified species of timber. So it has been in the contractor's interest to ensure that the department rejects the timber.

He has done this in two ways. Until a recent amendment, pieces less than two metres in length were legally considered fuel wood, not timber. It was a serious lacuna in the nationalisation act of which the contractors took full advantage. So the logs were deliberately cut shorter than 2 m so that the department rejected the wood. It is an indication of the Government's unwillingness to react that this loophole was used brazenly for 14 years.

The contractor's second option lies in simply bribing the purchasing forest official to reject the wood, even when it was longer than two metres. In some areas, as much as 80 per cent of the teak offered was rejected. An official can turn down timber on any of several grounds: the tree may be bent, knotted, hollow or have fungus. In recent raids in Seoni, contractors were found in possession of perfectly good teak which had been rejected by the forest officials.

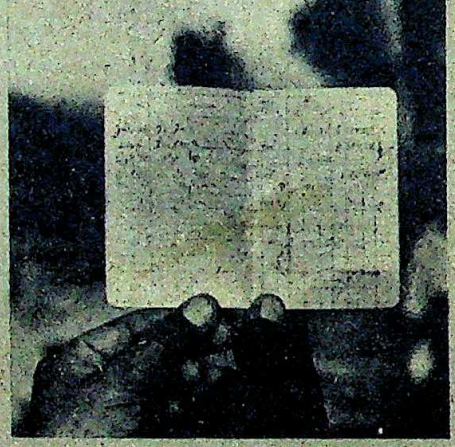
THE COLLECTOR of Mandla, M.M. Dahima, admits: "There can be no theft or cheating without the connivance or assistance of the forest staff. There are many cases of uncalled-for rejections and at times, even where the log is longer than two metres, it is shown as being less in length." Dahima himself has been very careful about allowing felling since he became collector 18 months ago.

However, less than two years ago, Mandla was the site of one of the biggest attempted swindles by a clique of officials. In May 1982, while the then collector, Wilfred Lakra, was away, deputy collector R.P. Dube held the reins. Within 10 days, Dube granted permission to cut trees in 1,447 cases—a total of 24,794 trees, of which 20,457 were teak.

Indeed, in 65 cases, Dube granted permission to cut more trees than the applicant himself had asked for: an excess of 705 trees, 495 of them teak. In 617 of the cases—nearly half the number—the patwaris had not even listed the total number of trees standing, a basic requirement in the application.

Lakra, on his return, sought the Revenue Board's permission to stay these orders. Six naib tehsildars, one tehsildar and three additional tehsildars were suspended and then reinstated. An official inquiry is still going on but though the fraud is obvious, there have been no dismissals.

The amounts the tribals have received has largly depended on the interest the collectors have taken in ensuring that they are fairly compensated. For instance, Nanhu,



The Forest Department paid Girani through the bank. Not knowing how to operate a bank account, he asked a village "ma saheb" for help. In all, the teacher helped Girani withdraw Rs 4,871.87 — the entire sum—but the tribal still thinks he withdrew only Rs 1,000.

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ond, sold 54 trees—mainly teak—at only 55 each about four years ago. His holding just half-an-hour's drive from Mandla on e Mandla-Jabalpur highway and its accessibility should have brought a much tter price. Says Nanhu: "It never occurred me that the trees were worth more. Even if had, who could I have possibly checked the ice with? Who would bother to tell me?"

On the other hand, Balesh Das, a -year-old villager, claims that two years o, his family sold 34 teak trees for Rs 225 ch—still not a very good price but certainbetter than what most others have got. But happened simply because the then colctor insisted on the payment of at least Rs 0 to Rs 300 per tree.

truly effective. Obviously farmers who do not know they are being cheated cannot resist it.

The other factor working against them is their illiteracy. Khemsi, for example, a Gond in Chhindwara district's Baratmari village, sold about 50 teak trees in 1978-79 and says he received a payment of Rs 500—or Rs 10 per tree.

According to government records in Chhindwara, Khemsi's trees gave 23.2 cu m of wood. Of this, the Forest Department rejected the bulk, 17.5 cu m, which the contractor took away. However, 5.7 cu m was bought by the department, for which, according to government records, Khemsi was paid Rs 4,932.40. But Khemsi, who put his thumb impression on several papers that he didn't understand—possibly including a bank cheque—got nothing.



There has been wide abuse of a rule perting farmers to keep a portion of the ber for their personal use. The Governt has permitted them to claim as much as u m of wood—roughly equal to 10 trees. rmers have no need for wood in such large ntities and invariably this too has been d to contractors at the usual pitiable rates. eed, in one district, a tribal got permiss- to keep 54 cu m of teak for his "personal —six truck-loads of timber!

The state Government has recently nded the definition of "timber" in the onalisation act to remove all references the minimum length of pieces. Though overdue, the step will undoubtedly plug ajor loophole. Moreover, by an executive er, the amount of wood that a farmer can for his "personal use" has now been sely restricted.

But the problem is far from over. The or issue is that villagers simply are not re of the value of timber. There has been ttempt to educate them about the value eir possessions. Unless this is done any ber of rules or amendments cannot be

Girani, another Gond of Daihar, a village deep in the interior, provides the classic example of an illiterate being cheated. Girani says he got Rs 1,000 for 20 teak trees. But according to the records, of the 11.6 cu m Girani sold, 8.18 cu m was bought by the Forest Department for Rs 4,824.55 and this amount was deposited in a savings account in Girani's name in the State Bank of India's Agricultural Development Branch in Chhindwara (Account no. 12100) on July 26, 1980.

Girani says that he did not know how to operate the account and a forest official in the area, a deputy range assistant, casually suggested that he seek the assistance of a schoolteacher in Surlakhapa, a large village a few kilometres away. The "ma saheb" (for master saheb) is always a respected figure in rural Madhya Pradesh.

Girani recalls that he visited the bank on three occasions with the teacher and withdrew sums of Rs 500, Rs 400 and Rs 100. He shows his passbook, in which there are indeed three withdrawals, but for Rs 500 (July 26, 1980), for Rs 3,000 (October 8, 1980) and for Rs 1,371.87 (December 10,1980). In all, the teacher helped Girani withdraw Rs 4,871.87—the entire sum, including interest—but the tribal still thinks that he withdrew only Rs 1,000.

In these circumstances, the problem calls for deft and delicate handling. A ban on felling cannot be a long-term solution. In any case, legally it would not hold water because the trees, after all, are the private property of the farmers. The way out, says a senior Forest Department official, is selective felling by rotation so that while trees are preserved, the farmer also gets a steady income to keep him going.

But there seems to be no solution in the offing, as the state Government has simply closed its eyes to the racket. In so many years, there has not been a single official survey to indicate the extent of the felling statewide. District collectors are unable to provide even rough statistics of felling in their districts—although permissions are granted by them. Says Chief Minister Arjun Singh when faced with these facts: "If this has not registered, then we will just have to sit up and take notice, I guess."

To this lethargy add monumental confusion. In November 1981, Arjun Singh and his Cabinet had met at Jagdalpur in Bastar district amid wide publicity. Briefing the press then, the chief minister had announced that restrictions had been placed on the felling of trees on private lands. The announcement brought a round of applause from all quarters.

Singh had also indicated that action would be initiated against a prominent Congress(I) leader of Bastar who is widely believed to have been involved in cheating tribals for their timber. Twenty-seven months later, Singh still says that action against the leader is being initiated.

As for the Cabinet decision itself: what did "restrictions" on felling mean? Were collectors told to be more cautious in granting permission? Singh now says: "I presume so." But there has been no follow-up in the field.

When asked about this, the state's Chief Secretary, Bramhaswaroop, came up with an even more startling statement. "Among the Cabinet decisions taken at Jagdalpur, there is none referring to restrictions on tree felling on private lands," he says.

With such glaring contradictions—and the ignorance and indifference that they reflect—in the highest levels of government, it is no wonder that out in the forests of rural Madhya Pradesh, the game goes on. For most of the tribals themselves cannot see the wood for the trees.

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DRUGS

The Cochin Conduit

COCHIN, the bustling city on the west coast, has always been a popular haunt for smugglers dealing in synthetics and electronic goods. But now there are worrying signs that international drug traffickers have discovered that the city is a useful staging point to take drugs easily out of the country.

Reports about drug trafficking have been circulating for several months. Cochin hit the headlines when the US coastguard intercepted a ship named Hetty in November last year. On board they found $100 million (Rs 100 crore) worth of high quality hashish that was initially thought to have been loaded in Cochin.

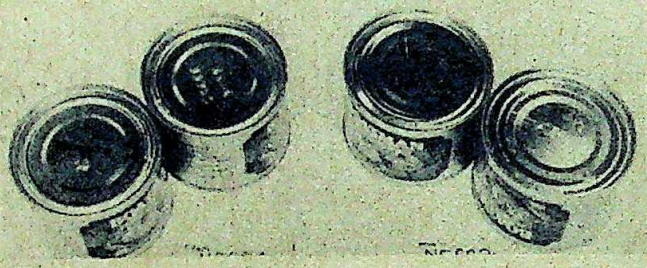
But whether the Hetty's cargo came from Cochin or not there has been another big haul that indicates that Cochin may have found its way onto the world drug smuggling map. Police have recently more or less wrapped up investigations which show that a big foreign syndicate had a hand in an attempt to smuggle heroin out of the country last year.

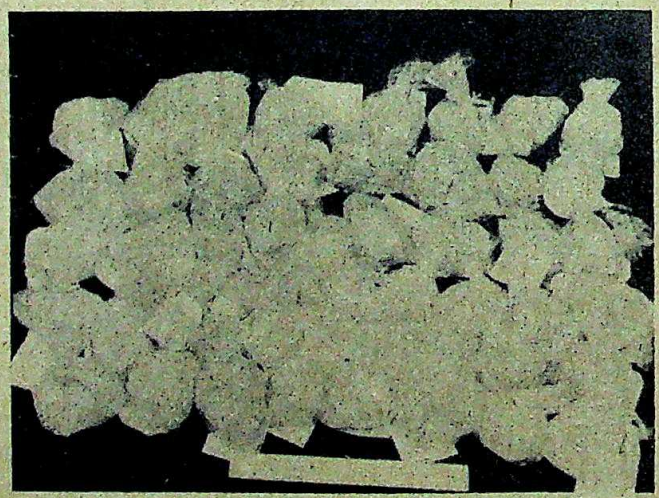
The case first came to light on May 20, 1983 when customs officers in Manchester, England, decided to check a consignment of crab meat sent from Cochin. When they opened one can they found it filled to the brim with heroin. As they went over the whole consignment of 192 cans they discovered a total of 6 kg of heroin crammed into 48 tins. Even in India the consignment was worth around Rs 25 lakh. On the international market it could have fetched nearly Rs 2.5 crore.

The discovery of the heroin triggered off a big hunt for the men who had masterminded the operation. Two narcotics officials flew down from Manchester to Cochin to investigate the deal. At the same time the local police also began a determined hunt for the men behind the transaction.

It has taken several months but the police now have what they believe is a fairly accurate picture of how the entire deal was struck. The key man they would like to talk to is Mankat Ram Anand, who, according to customs officers was arrested in 1978 on charges of smuggling hashish in torch batteries. But he managed to jump bail and is still eluding the police.

Investigations have also pinpointed four other men from Cochin who police believe were in the plot. So far they have arrested three—J.T. Simon, who is said to have booked the consignment, V.A.N. Pillai, the manager of a firm named Jaya Enterprises which makes tin cans and Y.M. Ibrahim, the owner of a firm named Bright International. Another man, wanted by the customs, Daniel C. George obtained anticipatory bail from the sessions court but has been interrogated several times. The customs have also collected an array of documents, including hotel bills and telephone exchange records which they believe give a detailed picture of how the deal was first hatched in a New Delhi hotel in early 1983 and how frequently meetings were held.





Heroin seizures: in 'crab meat' tines (top) and in polythene bags



Bullock: ingenious tricks

The investigations show that the racket was extremely well-organised and had strong international links. The heroin had been brought all the way from Karachi to Cochin. From here it was packed in tins and sent to Bombay from where it was flown out of the country. A Pakistani smuggling ring that is active in England was to have taken delivery of the consignment in Manchester. One Pakistani who went to collect the goods was immediately nabbed by the British Customs. Payment was to have been made in Canada by a group that is well-established in the narcotics trade.

The method of taking the heroin out of the country was selected with care. The five ounce crab meat tins were labelled as samples for export promotion and carried the brand name 'Boatman'. Usually sample tins are not subjected to customs or quality control checks. In this case customs officers became suspicious because they could not feel any brine in the tins.

Simon is said to have booked the export consignment with a leading firm Harrisons and Crosfield, in the name of T.P. Moideen Kutty of Panikkar's Road, Calicut. Investigations reveal that there is no such person. It was also surprising that Simon could have got away with this forgery since most of the clerks in the firm know him well.

The Cochin Customs still believe that trafficking has been kept to fairly low levels. They claim that there is no evidence that the hashish on the Hetty was from Cochin. They add that there have only been a limited number of drug hauls over the years. The biggest case in recent years was when Ronald Steven Bullock an Australian smuggler was nabbed. Bullock was a daredevil who had some ingenious ways of smuggling drugs. He was an excellent swimmer and would attach portable containers full of hashish to the propeller or rudder of vessels when they were in port. Bullock had apparently chosen Bombay as his base but had come to Cochin several times. He later jumped bail in Bombay.

Apart from that there have only been comparatively minor hauls over the years. The biggest was when 300 pounds of opium from Cochin were found in Hong Kong in 1970. Later in 1972 the US Customs seized cashew nut tins with false bottoms containing opium. But these were all small-time operations by local people. The heroin that went out of the city last year was a consignment sent by an international ring.

—G. SHAHEED in Cochin

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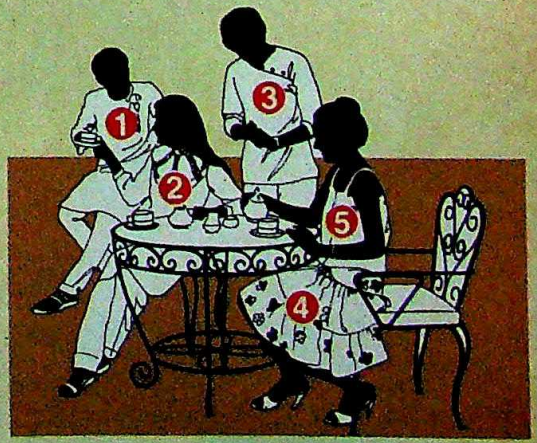
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thackersey fabrics



Location: The Village, Worli.

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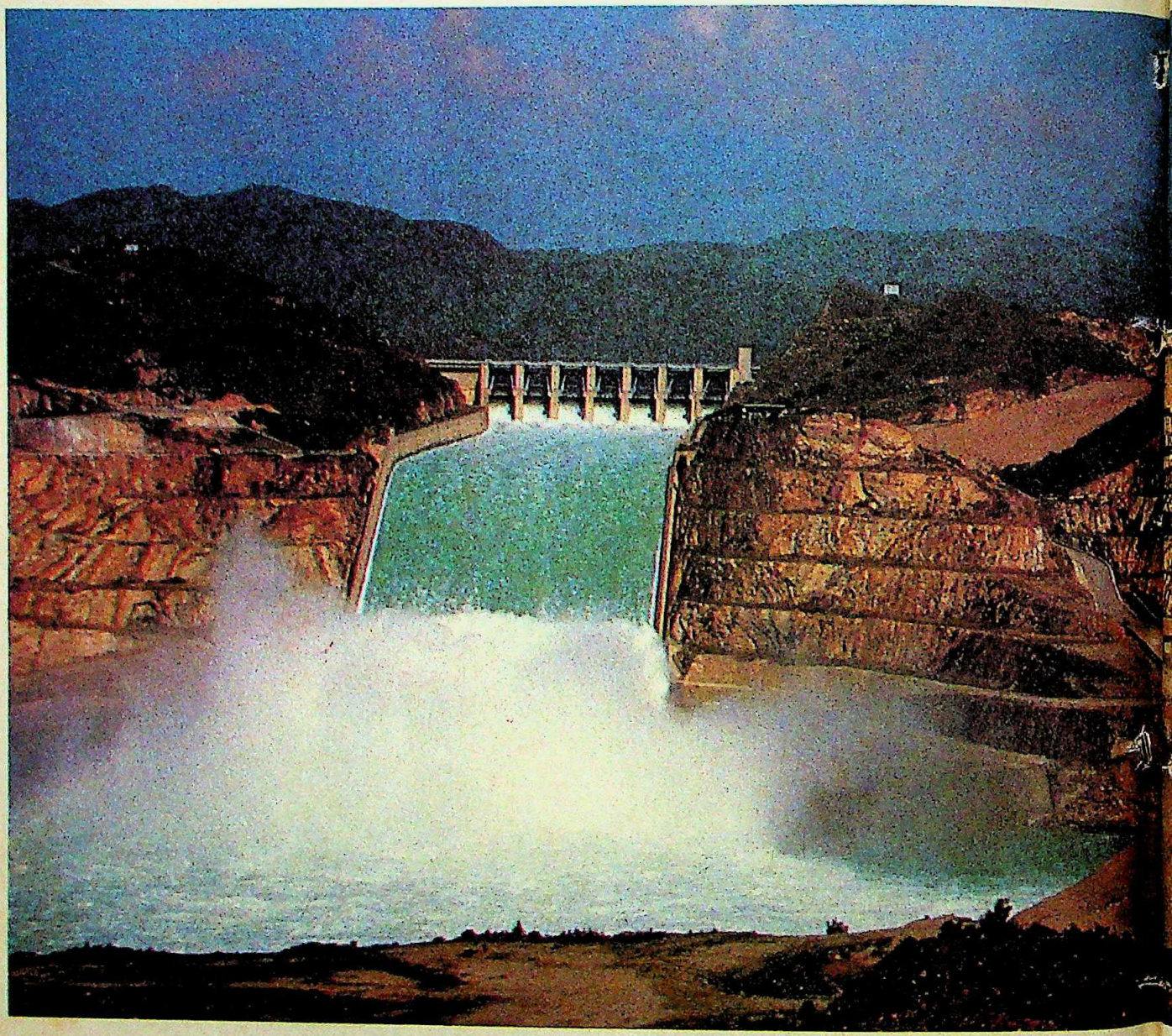
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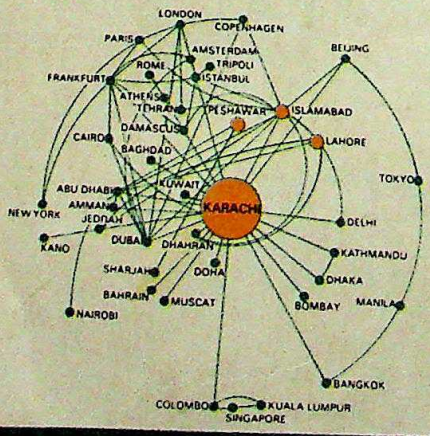
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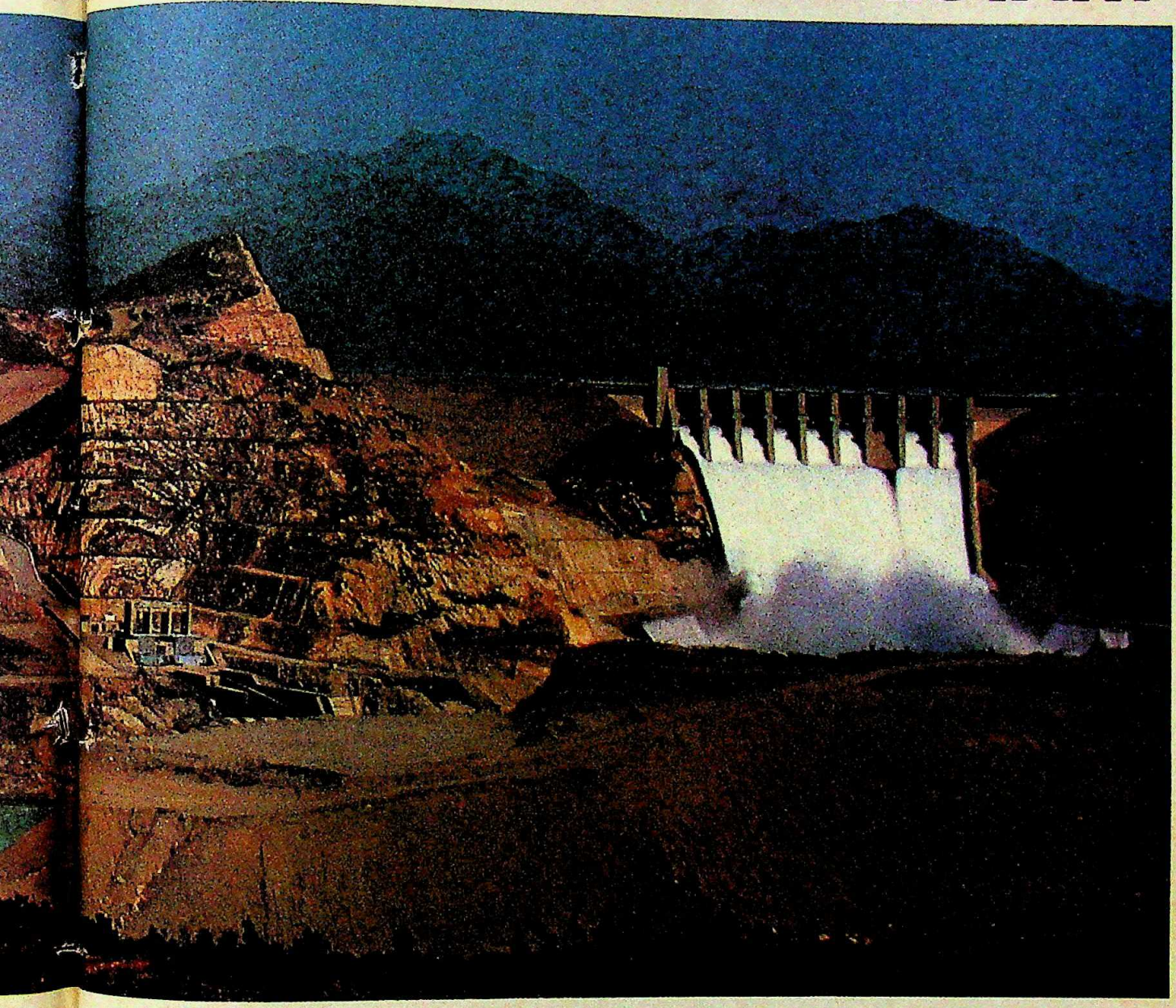
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THE MONEY LENDING RUSH

CLOSE on the heels of commercial banks like Chase Manhattan, which are trying to set up fullfledged branches in India, a flood of merchant bankers too is now headed India's way. British, American and Japanese merchant banking companies who have shown an interest in India in recent months include Hambros Bank, Merrill Lynch, Goldman Sachs, Hill Samuel and S.G. Warburg. Many of these are teaming up with domestic companies to offer their services; Warburg with Ashok Birla, Hambros with National Insulated Cable Company, and Hill Samuel with Champaklal Investment and Financial Consultancy. Yet other domestic outfits are now looking for international hook-ups in order to keep pace with their domestic rivals, and some of them are looking to Japan. If the Government gives its approval, most of the new operations are likely to be based in Bombay, which could in the process become something of an international financial centre.

SHARE SCARE

WITH corporate takeover raids becoming more common, the practice of companies rejecting the registration of share transfers in their books appears to be getting more common too. The Escorts and DCM share transfer imbroglios are, therefore, only the tip of the iceberg. Investment companies and stock market analysts point to a string of similar cases, including such companies as Corn Products and Dharmsi Morarji, where even small lots of 2,000 shares or less have not been formally registered in company books, apparently because of fears of possible takeover bids.

SLOW GRIND

THE GOVERNMENT seems to be moving slowly and in wayward fashion after the haste with which it nationalised 13 textile mills in Bombay last October. More than four months later that, no fewer than eight of the 13 mills are yet to reopen; and in the case of those that have, some workmen are worse off than before, even though one of the objects of the nationalisation was to protect the rights of workers. In the case of the Elphinstone Mills, formerly run by A.K. Jalan and his brothers, 17 head office staff have stopped receiving their salaries since December, despite the fact that the taken-over mill had paid them their wages in October and November.

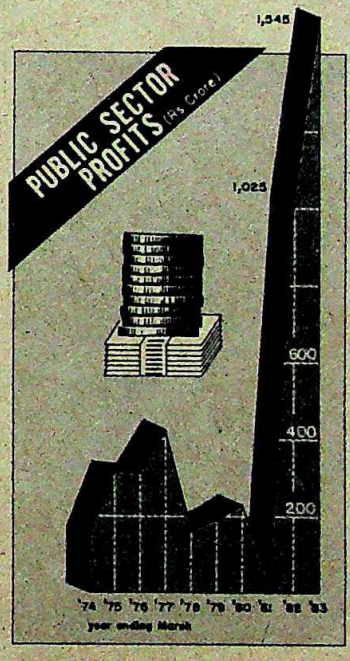
STORM IN A TEACUP

CIGARETTE giant ITC has dropped its proposal, first mooted two years ago, to go in for the retail marketing of packaged tea. The proposal had come when A.N. Haksar was chairman of the company, and involved a tie-up with the tea company Lipton India. The marketing arrangement would have been geared to using ITC's existing marketing network (since the same outlets in both towns and villages sell tea and cigarettes) and would have offered competition to Brooke Bond, Lipton and Duncan Agro-Industries. Since Haksar's departure, however, ITC has decided to drop the proposal.

RACE FOR PROJECTS

THE THAPARS have joined the race for setting up PTA (purefied terephthalic acid) projects, and plan to set up a plant with an installed capacity of 1.5 lakh tonnes at a capital cost of Rs 130 crore, at Chohal village in Hoshiarpur district in Punjab. This will be a major diversification for the Jagatjit Cotton Textile Mills, which has over the last few years gained prominence in nylon yarn as well. Meanwhile, Dhirubhai Ambani of Reliance Textile Industries has not dropped out of the PTA race altogether.

LUBRICATING PERFORMANCE



THE 193 public sector enterprises owned by the Central Government have been turning in steadily improving profitability performances, but this is little cause for cheer. Although the figures compiled for 1982-83 show a pre-tax profit of Rs 1,545.37 crore (up from Rs 1, 024.66 crore in the previous year), almost all the profits came from the oil companies. Three of these—the oil and Natural Gas Commision, Oil India Ltd and Indian Oil Corporation—turned in profits of Rs 1,538 crore, and the oil sector as a whole earned Rs 1,628 crore. Without this, the rest of the public sector would in fact have ended up in the red by Rs 83 crore, on an investment of over Rs 20,000 crore. Matters have, in fact, got worse during the current financial year: the first six months resulted in a net loss of Rs 113 crore—despite the profits from the oil sector. And for enterprises owned by state governments the record is still worse.

There is, however, a slight improvement in capacity utilisation, although here too the record is patchy. Of the 164 units in production in March 1983, 90 achieved capacity utilisation of over 75 per cent (80 in the previous year, out of 148 units). But as many as 31 had a capacity utilisation of under 50 per cent.

CORPORATE CINEMA

ENGINEERING giant Larsen and Toubro is going into film production in a big way, and intends investing roughly Rs 4 crore in this new activity. The company's first film, on the life of an industrial worker, is likely to be made by maestro Satyajit Ray, based on a script planned to be written by Vijay Tendulkar. Company spokesmen say the details are still to be decided, and that the new venture will not be for profit but an expression of the company's sense of social responsibility. This will be the first time an Indian corporate giant will be entering the film world in this direct fashion. Earlier, a cigarette company had been more loosely involved in helping out with the production of a TV film based on M.M. Kaye's book *The Far Pavilions*. Meanwhile, reports also speak of Larsen and Toubro considering an entry into the tyre industry thus adding to its earlier diversifications in cement and shipping.

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THE BUDGET

The Spending Spree



THE DAY after the budget was introduced in Parliament, I was asked to explain it to a group of workers, none of whom, as far as I could make out, knew the difference between surplus and deficit, or, for that matter, between balance of payments and balance of trade. However, I had to start somewhere and began by saying that the Government would spend over Rs 42,000 crore next year, and more than half the amount would be spent on day-to-day housekeeping expenses and the rest on what is known as development.

There was stunned silence in the room. I thought they were going to ask what was meant by development as everyone nowadays is asking but that is not what they had on their minds.

The average annual income of India's 6 lakh villages is about Rs 20 lakh each. The Government would thus spend in an hour what 25 villages earn in a whole year.

"How much is Rs 42,000 crore?" asked a man in the last row. I had met the man before the meeting and he had told me that he worked in a canteen and made about Rs 15 on a good day. It was a good question but no matter how hard I tried, I just could not make him or his friends understand what the figure meant. Then I tried another track.

I told him that the Government would spend about Rs 120 crore a day, or if they wanted a still smaller figure, Rs 5 crore per hour. After all, in this age of inflation everybody knew what a crore was, but I was wrong. After the talk, which never really got off the ground, the man came to me and said that it had gone over his head and could I please explain to him how anybody could spend Rs 5 crore, or, for that matter, a crore an hour.

I now realise why budgets leave most people cold. They know it has something to do with income and spending but the sums are astronomical and so far removed from their meagre lives that the budget might as well refer to the moon.

When I returned home, I did some calculations. There are about 6 lakh villages in India and the income of an average village would be about Rs 20 lakh a year. The Government would thus be spending in an hour what it takes 25 villages to earn in a whole year. The kind of income you and I earn, the Government spends in a few seconds. It takes four seconds for the babus in North Block to run through the income of a man earning Rs 50,000 a year, and less than half a second to gobble the income of our friend who wanted to know how much Rs 42,000 crore was. Now, I hope, he does.

It is not generally realised how big a slice of the nation's income the Government appropriates in the name of administration and development. Ten years ago (in 1975-76 to be precise) the total expenditure of the Central Government was only Rs 12,580 crore which accounted for 19 per cent of the gross national product (GNP). For the next four years, the expenditure increased by about 10 per cent per year, and by 1979-80, the figure had crossed Rs 19,000 crore.

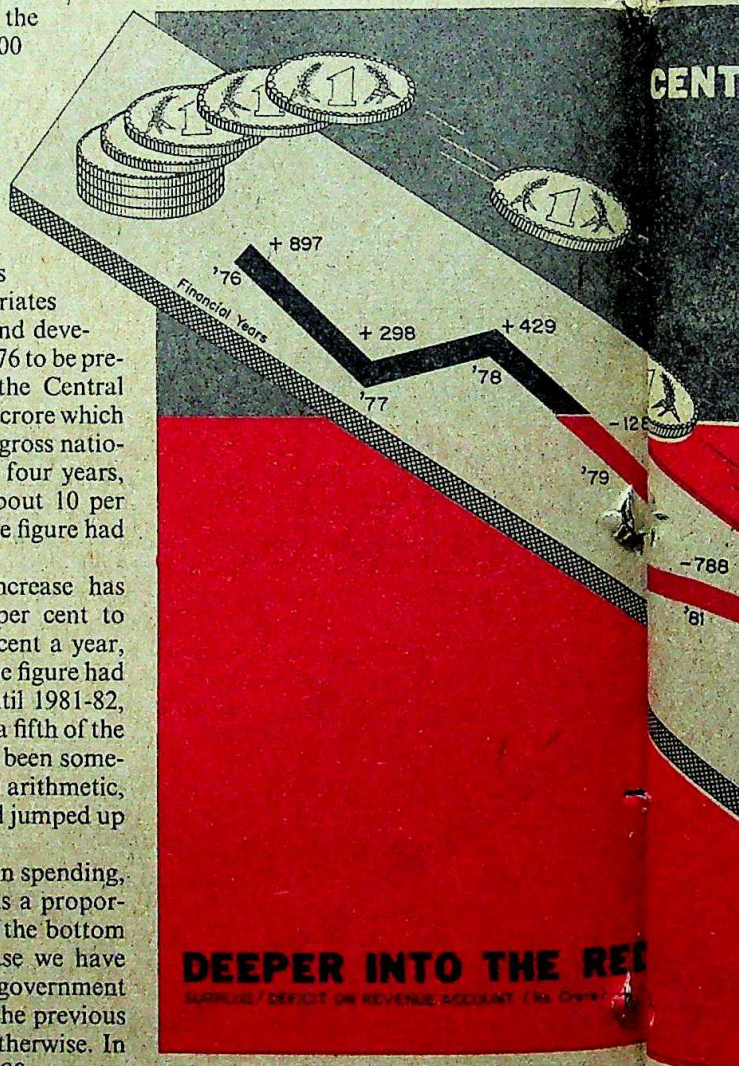
Since then, the rate of increase has apparently doubled, from 10 per cent to something very close to 20 per cent a year, for in the following four years, the figure had doubled to Rs 39,000 crore. Until 1981-82, total expenditure was still about a fifth of the GNP, but that year seems to have been something of a watershed in our fiscal arithmetic, for within two years the ratio had jumped up to 25 per cent.

It is this galloping increase in spending, both in absolute terms as also as a proportion of GNP that is apparently at the bottom of the unusual inflationary phase we have been passing through, though government spokesmen tend to blame it on the previous government. But the facts are otherwise. In the four years 1975-76 to 1979-80, government spending increased by about 50 per cent and the wholesale price index by 6 per cent. In the following four years ended 1982-83, government spending nearly doubled and the wholesale price index went up by 45 per cent.

It is true that the deficits during the latter period were bigger than those during the first four years, but they were not really all that big relative to the size of the total spending. In relative terms, they are perhaps only twice that big, but that does not explain the sevenfold increase in the price index.

The real culprit is not the size of the deficit but the fact that the Government spent and continues to spend so much—and totally out of proportion with the national product—that it just cannot avoid having a deficit. The state has over the years become so greedy that its growing appetite can be satisfied only through paper money.

There is also another aspect to this insatiable greed that seems to have escaped attention. Until 1975-76, the revenue account was always in surplus, as the receipts always exceeded expenditure. The budget of 1976-77, the second year of the Emergency, was the first budget to show a deficit on the revenue account, a sign that the state could not manage to live within its means. During the next two years, the budget went into surplus again, but ran into deficit in Charan Singh's 1979-80 budget. Since then, it has not looked back. All revenue budgets since then have been deficit budgets, the deficits increasing steadily from Rs 700 crore in 1979-80 to Rs 2,600 crore in 1984-85. What this means is that the Government of India has been eating into capital every year, like the maha-

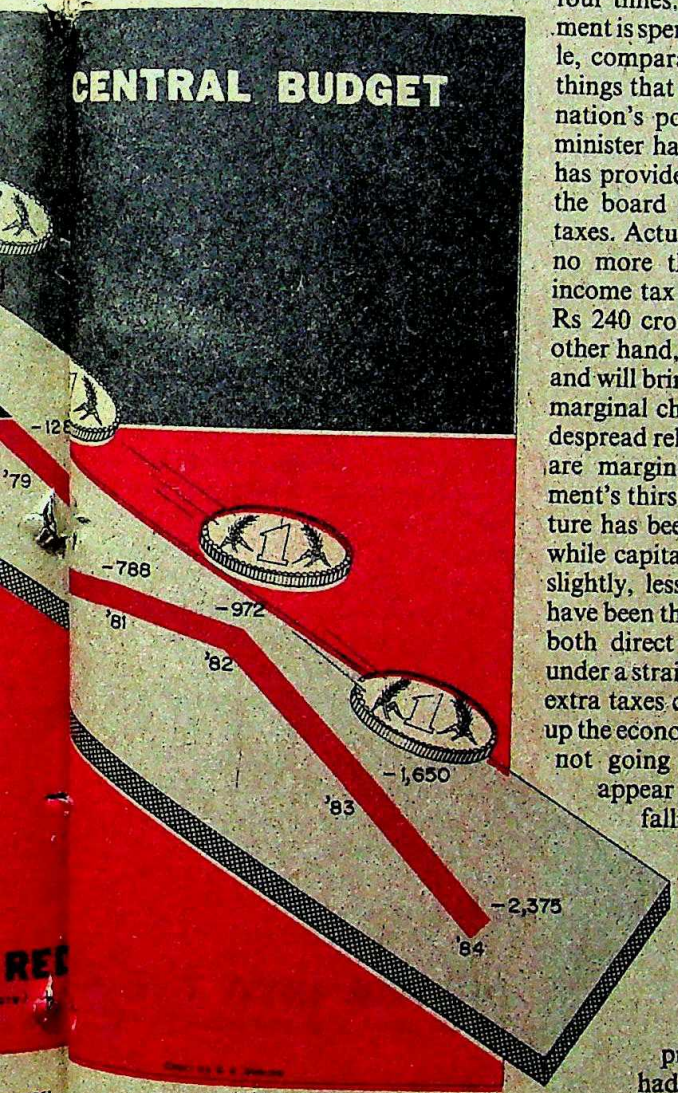


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as of old, for the deficit on current account can be made good only by transferring money from the capital side of the budget. It is astonishing, to say the least, that a country whose financial managers are always shouting from roof-tops about stringency in resources should use these resources not for growth but for consumption.

Next year capital expenditure is expected to be of the order of Rs 16,000 crore while the deficit on revenue account is Rs 2,375 crore, or nearly 15 per cent of capital spending. In 1979-80, this figure was less



a 10 per cent. It has since been growing idly and might reach 20 per cent in ther couple of years or so. The Governt will be dipping into its capital every r to this extent for maintaining its lavish style.

This is not all. Ten years ago, the budget d to show a healthy surplus on the reveaccount and a deficit on the capital side. it is the other way round. There is a deon the revenue side and a small surplus e capital account. No one has explained this should be so. This may be just a book-keeping gimmick but it would be interesting to watch what happens when the estimates for the year are finally revised.

THE NET result of all this is that, contrary to all theories of development, the size of capital expenditure as a proportion of total spending has been falling steadily, from 43 per cent 10 years ago to 38 per cent next year. During this period the expenditure on capital account will have trebled—though not in real terms—while that on revenue account will have gone up nearly four times. It is not clear why the Government is spending so much on itself and so little, comparatively speaking, on those other things that go, or should go, to build up the nation's potential for growth. The finance minister has made much of the fact that he has provided reliefs and concessions across the board and has not imposed any new taxes. Actually the reliefs are only nominal, no more than Rs 60 crore in respect of income tax on personal incomes and about Rs 240 crore in the case of excise. On the other hand, customs duties have been hiked and will bring in over Rs 450 crore. But these marginal changes—the budget brought widespread relief precisely because the changes are marginal—cannot slake the Government's thirst for funds, for revenue expenditure has been hiked by over Rs 3,000 crore while capital expenditure has gone up only slightly, less than Rs 500 crore. It should have been the other way round. It is true that both direct and indirect taxes have come under a strain and have reached a point when extra taxes can be collected only by heating up the economy. Actually, tax collections are not going up in real terms. They only appear to be going up because of the falling rupee.

Pranab Mukherjee is rather coy about the impact of his budget on prices, and it is perhaps as well that he has kept mum on the issue. I, for one, cannot see how we can escape higher prices. The key to prices in India is agriculture. We had a good harvest this year, a record harvest of 142 to 144 million tonnes of foodgrains, an increase of 13 to 14 million tonnes over the previous year. As against this, there is an increase of 10 per cent in government spending next year which should push up demand all round. If a rise of 13 per cent to 14 per cent in farm output last year could not hold prices in check, I cannot see how a much smaller rise, no more perhaps than 2 or 3 per cent, if that at all, can do so. If there is no increase in foodgrains production and the figure remains unchanged around 145 million tonnes, we shall be in real trouble. It is not taxes or reliefs that determine how prices behave. It is the size of demand created by government spending (among other things) that affects prices and unless that is controlled and brought within a reasonable limit, prices will give way.

Also, it is not only spending but the quality of spending that also matters. A rupee spent by a government department has a qualitatively different impact from a rupee spent by, say, a Birla firm or a company like Hindustan Lever, who are known for the way they earn and spend their money and how much they can get out of it. A well-managed private sector company can get more out of its rupee than, say, a state-run unit like National Textile Corporation (NTC) and the NTC probably does better than the Handloom Corporation of Madhya Pradesh or Bihar. Unfortunately, the Government treasury has become something of a bottomless pit and very little that goes in comes out in the form of tangible benefits. New Delhi is not short of resources; they slip through its fingers because it does not know

Unfortunately, the Government treasury has become something of a bottomless pit and very little that goes in comes out in the form of tangible benefits.

or does not care to know how to get the best out of whatever it has or can lay its hands on.

I don't know how I could have explained all this to my friends who, I am sure, work their own budgets better, as we all do, than Pranab Mukherjee and his colleagues in North Block. One reason, of course, for the spending spree of the last couple of years is the ease with which money has flowed in from outside the country—mainly from IMF and non-residents. The debt burden is expected to go up to Rs 74,000 crore by March 1985, or a thousand rupees per man, woman and child, against a per capita income of about twice that amount. Roughly a third of this debt has been contracted during the last three years. It has in fact more than doubled in six years. Nothing else in the economy has doubled during this period, neither our national income, nor industrial production, nor exports. Only the debt keeps piling up at the rate of nearly Rs 10,000 crore a year. Soft budgets may make good headlines in the newspapers, but only until you start paying for them through the nose.

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COMPANY LAW

Tightening the Reins

AFTER more than three years of progressively giving industry its head, the Government now seems ready to rein in once again. In a series of decisions—some announced last fortnight, others placed before Parliament earlier, and a third set still getting finalised—the Government seemed set to try and bring about major changes in the corporate working environment. While opinions differed as to the final results that would be achieved (after all, for every law there is a loophole), on paper at least the changes were far reaching.

To begin with, the Government issued new guidelines aimed at tightening the grip of the public sector financial institutions over private companies. In a second move, proposals were being finalised for drastically amending the Companies Act, giving the Company Law Board the status of an independent quasi-judicial body, and arming it with the power to levy penalties and jail businessmen. Further, the amendments sought to arm the Government with the power to split existing companies ("in the public interest") and acquire any one of the de-linked units, to force companies to pay damages in cases where they had wrongfully refused to register the transfer of shares, and much more.

Meanwhile, Parliament was already considering a bill to amend the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act, which if passed will cast the MRTP net much wider, rope in many companies now outside its fold, and plug some of the gaping loopholes which company managements have used to try and evade its grasp.

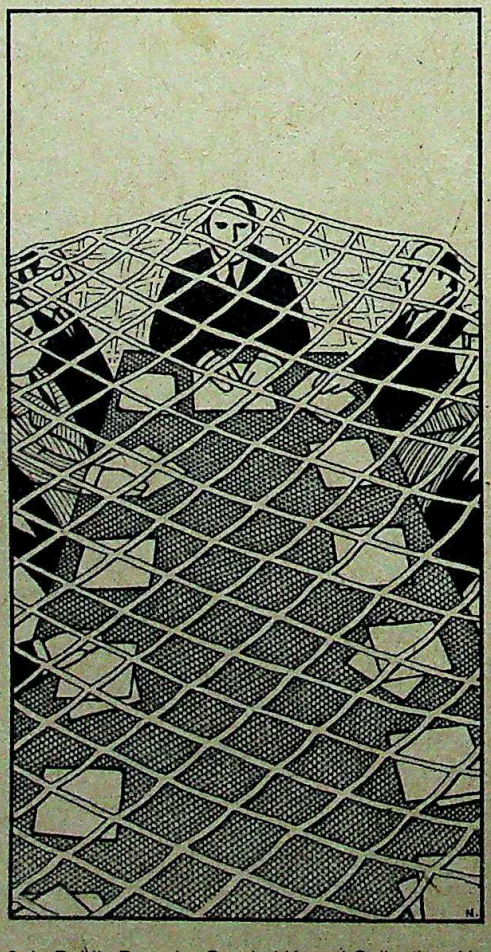
The amendments and decisions were not one-sided: there were, for instance, some clear relaxations included in the new guidelines regarding the conversion of institutional loans into shares in borrowing companies; and some of the changes in company law are indisputably sensible and welcome. Nevertheless, the overall effect of the proposed changes was to make industrialists see red, and for alarm bells to ring in corporate boardrooms.

For instance, the new guidelines to people nominated by the financial institutions on to company boards charged them with the responsibility of overseeing a special audit of company spending keeping an eye on company sale and purchase contracts (widely believed to include kickbacks to managements), and curbing lavish expenditure on senior management personnel. Some of these are nothing more than a repetition of existing guidelines, but against the backdrop of a growing awareness of institutional power over companies, the new guidelines seemed to signal a new desire on the Government's part to make its presence felt in corporate boardrooms.

If the call to institutions to curb lavish expenditure found an echo in Swraj Paul's campaign last year against the high-spending life-styles of Indian industrialists (whom he called the 'new maharajahs'), other changes too had his long shadow over them. There is, for instance, the proposal to include in company law a provision that managements must explain in two months why they have refused to register transfers of any shares.

It was, in many cases, this backdrop rather than the changes that seemed to cause businessmen worry: Pranlal Bhogilal, president of the Indian Merchants Chamber, said: "What worries me is that the regulations do not mean anything if one has political clout. People with clout are able to manage anything and everything, whereas these regulations are held out against all the others."

But in numerous instances the changes were in themselves serious enough to merit attention: One new requirement under company law will be that no one under 30 or over 65 can be a managing director of a company—a provision that automatically knocks out such well-known figures as Bharat Ram and Charat Ram of DCM, and H.P. Nanda of Escorts. Another change makes it mandatory that companies over a certain size must have a managing director or whole-time director (who will therefore automatically come under the pay ceiling that the Government has imposed for incumbents to these posts). Numerous industrial groups, notably the Birlas but also others like the Mahindras, had tried to evade the pay ceilings by re-designating managing directors as company presidents, and the change now proposed is clearly aimed at stopping this.



Limits are also proposed to be placed on how much a company can expand its installed capacity through modernisation of technology and the installation of balancing equipment. The Government wants to restrict this to 25 per cent, thereby preventing cases like that of Modi Rubber, which more than doubled capacity through "improvements in productivity".

And in another change, aimed at blocking clandestine take-over bids, investments made by the subsidiaries of MRTP companies will also need the Government's clearance. This is designed for the kind of situation that arose in 1982, when ITC bought controlling shares in India Cements through four investment subsidiaries, and claimed that no MRTP permission was required because ITC itself had not bought any shares!

In more minor changes that are proposed, the minimum number of shareholders/strength of shareholding required to call for a poll at an annual general meeting has been raised to prevent "professional shareholders" from making a nuisance of themselves at annual shareholder meetings; a company must change its auditors after specified periods; and companies will be freed from the obligation of sending out annual reports to all shareholders every year—to save cost but this is a move that industrialists criticise.

ALSO thousands of private limited companies will be deemed to be public limited companies under new provisions in the Companies Act. Many of the changes proposed are the result of spade-work done earlier: the company law changes, for instance, are mostly based on the six-year-old recommendations of the Sachar Committee; and the new perspective on the role of the financial institutions (to the extent that it is new) flows from the work done by the Narasimham Committee last year. Numerous other changes are part of an effort to correct the position flowing from court cases that went against the Government—one of

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"I don't think all this is going to go very far in actually controlling or curbing anybody."

—Ashok Birla
managing director, Zenith Steel Pipes and Tungabhadra Industries

which said, for instance, that a company ed not get the Government's prior appro- before appointing a managing director. his will, according to the new provisions, be pecific legal requirement, with penalties violation.

Business response to the changes posed fell into two clear categories: one tion, like Pranlal Bhogilal, feared not the nges themselves but the misuse that the provisions could be put to. And the ond group felt that while nothing much uld really change, the nuisance value and ative psychological impact of the changes uld slow growth.

Thus, Ashok Birla, who runs Zenith el Pipes and Tungabhadra Industries, ued that "I don't think all this is going to very far in actually controlling or curbing body. But business is 75 per cent senti- nt and only 25 per cent objective asses- ent. And these things certainly affect the timent and the feeling about the business ironment."

L.M. Thapar, head of the Thapar group industries, felt that the changes would e varying degrees of impact. To start , the tightening of the MRTP Act that is posed would inevitably bring under its view some Thapar companies that are presently not in the MRTP net. But then, said Thapar: "Businessmen will inevitably try to get around the new measures in the same way that they have done in the case of past edicts." Companies get roped into the MRTP net if the controlling group owns more than 33 per cent of the shares. This is proposed to be reduced to 25 per cent. And Thapar said he would have to consider whether shareholding patterns would have to be changed in the Thapar companies now outside the MRTP net, so that they did not get roped in.

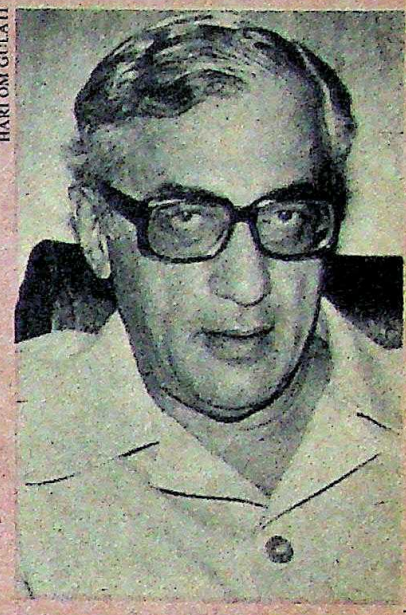
Finally, said Thapar, the Government's step regarding the institutions indicated a desire to load the gun. "If you load your gun, you're going to fire some time."

Like Thapar, K.K. Modi, vice-chairman of the Modi group, felt that the new guidelines to the institutions spelt the danger of "undue interference in the day-to-day affairs of companies". And D.N. Saxena, secretary-general of the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry, felt that a new conflict would develop regarding the institutional role in companies henceforth: "These bodies can't be both development institutions and policemen at the same time. And I think the policeman's attitude is likely to grow more and more."

One person who stoutly insisted that the bogey of institutional directors was being unnecessarily built up was S.K. Goyal of the Indian Institute of Public Administration. Goyal has been a tireless campaigner for greater public accountability of companies with large public institutional holdings, and he argued that institutional nominees on company boards had more often than not turned into public relations men for the companies. "A retired ICS officer on the board of a company will try to use his influence in the Government to get the company a licence. I think the logic of nominating institutional representatives on company boards has got distorted, and today a lot of noise is being made about nothing." Goyal went on to argue that the new guidelines to the institutions did not change this fundamental picture. "These guidelines will hurt nobody."

He may well have a point, but there is certainly cause for genuine worry over the new provision that will enable the Government to split and acquire companies. Chartered Accountant Pravin P. Shah argued that "they have such powers in the US, but even there it has been used in only one case, that of AT&T. And it took an act of Congress to do it. In the present case, it is dangerous for the Government to be entrusted with these vast powers. If they are to be given this power, it is really frightening."

Shah made the further point that putting age limits on company directors would be retrograde. "When Dilip Piramal took over Blow Plast, he was under 30. Yet it is



HARI OM GULATI

"If you load your gun, you're going to fire some time."

—L.M. Thapar
chairman, Thapar Group

today one of the star performers of the private sector. Similarly, there are many people over 70 running other exceptionally performing companies."

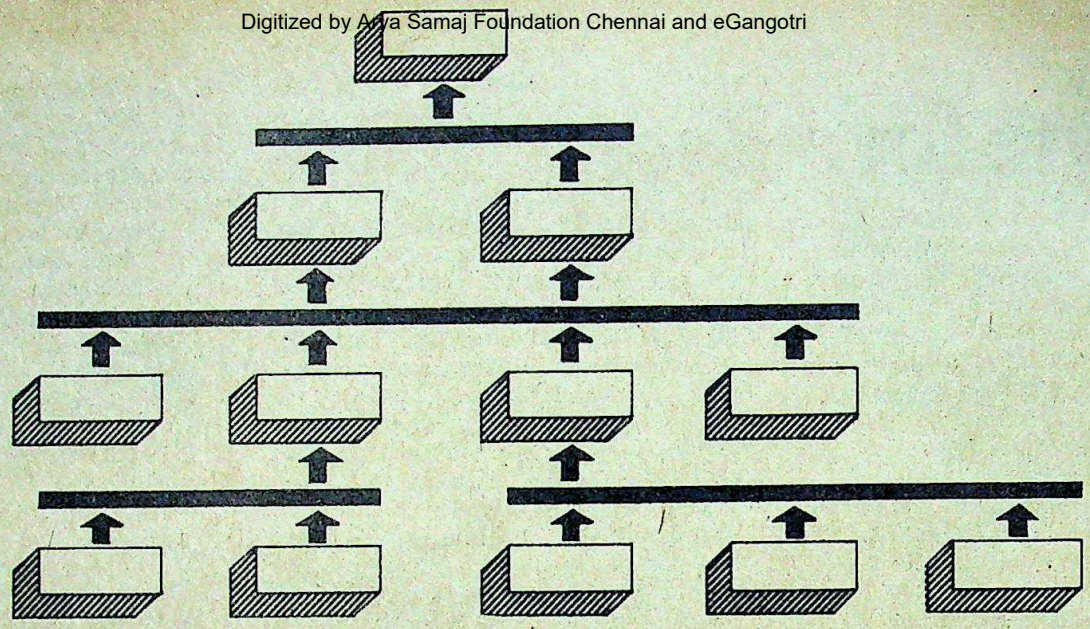
The changes in MRTP laws as a part of the effort to rope in more companies may, similarly, be meaningless. Birla pointed out that numerous companies were controlled with as little as 5 or 10 per cent of the shares. Dismissing such changes as meaningless rhetoric, Birla said: "The point is to get away from rhetoric and start meaningfully defining what is really a monopoly group. A monopoly exists only when there is an overwhelming market share, or a price-fixing cartel operating."

While the individual proposals were getting condemned or praised, one central point stood out regarding the entire package of measures (including such provisions in the Central budget as imposing the maximum possible rate of tax on trusts doing business): that the Government seemed to be changing its attitude to the corporate sector. Pranlal Bhogilal summed it up when he said: "For the last few years the private sector had felt that there was a trend towards the relaxation of unnecessary curbs and legislation. These steps are a reversal of that trend."

—T.N. NINAN with CHANDER UDAY SINGH

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COMPUTERS

A Byte for a Byte

FOR OVER a decade, India has been witness to a computer non-revolution. But that is changing. New manufacturers, easy component imports, lower duties and cheaper products have combined to put some zip into what was a small and insignificant business. And if the pace is maintained, as seems likely, the country might finally be able to claim that it has successfully entered the computer age.

The sales figures are still small by world standards, but not the growth rates: 50 per cent in 1981-82, 30 per cent in 1982-83, and an estimated 60 per cent in the current year. The size of the industry has, as a consequence, trebled from Rs 30 crore to Rs 94 crore in three years—a pace that is almost matched by the growth in the number of computer companies: 54 a year ago, an estimated 72 now, and—if the Government's calculations work out right—double that number in another two years.

Still bigger things could be in store for the industry as major markets (like banks and schools) get ready for the computer age. The commercial banks signed an agreement last year with their employees' unions, permitting the introduction of computers into specified functions. And in an important decision aimed at bringing computers into the schoolroom, the Government has decided to introduce 250 small systems in selected schools in a pilot project. This is expected to lead to 2.5 lakh schools installing computers in the next six years. This will be a quantum jump from the current level of sales—counted in a few thousands. S.U. Bilal of DCM Data Products, one of the earliest entrants in the field, estimates that the school and bank markets alone could be worth Rs 500 crore for the industry in a few years.

Inevitably, the market-place is buzzing with activity. Every month sees a clutch of new companies announcing their presence, older companies introducing new products, still others slashing prices, and the ineffective entrepreneurs dropping out. In recent months, a Bombay company has announced Sinclair and Apple systems starting from as low as Rs 2,500, a Bangalore company (Eiko) has offered a home computer for Rs 9,500, and a Delhi-based venture, Prime Home Computers, has introduced into the market a slightly more ambitious machine for Rs 13,000.

While these have introduced home and personal computers for the first time, other companies have crowded the small business machines market: Usha Microprocess Controls introduced its Eagle and Alpha series a year ago, Televista announced its Cosmos series, DCM re-entered the small machine market with its Tandy, and the Tatas' National Radio and Electronics Company (NELCO) introduced its Merlin.

These and other companies, like Zenith and IDM, have launched advertising blitzes, while older companies like Hindustan Computers (HCL) have tried to fight off the increasing competition by slashing prices to previously unimaginable levels: 8-bit systems (a bit representing one unit of information) used to sell for a minimum of Rs 3 lakh; now there are numerous systems available for between Rs 50,000 and Rs 1 lakh.

Most of the rapid growth is taking place at the lower-end of the market, and even companies that have so far specialised in more costly systems are now considering taking the plunge at the low-end: DCM's Ullal said his company really plans to concentrate on computer applications other than data processing, taking in computer-aided design, computer-aided teaching, process control and energy-saving systems. Nevertheless, the company has chosen to introduce the Tandy, while A.K. Jain of International Computers Indian Manufacture Ltd (ICIM) says his company too is now surveying the market for small computers to see if it can find a place there. Even Peico Electronics and Electricals (Philips) is said to be readying to enter the computer business jointly with a state public sector undertaking.

In the process, completely new kinds of customers are being weaned on to computers: Indra Bishnoi of Prime Home Computers says he is aiming his Rs 13,000 16-bit machine at the education market, professionals and traders. Even home-entertainment is a possible end-use. Says Bishnoi: "After all, people want to do something more creative at home than watching TV films or even video films."

The mini-boom in minicomputers has been brought about by several factors. First, in late 1979, the Government announced its policy for small computers, permitting the unrestricted import of most components and domestic assembly. This was followed up by a liberal licensing programme: no fewer than 151 entrepreneurs were granted licences in next to no time. Mean-



New manufacturers, easy component imports, lower duties and cheaper products have combined to put zip into the computer business. The industry has trebled sales in three years, and the number of computer companies is expected to double in the next two.

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while, the development abroad of cheap, small computers led to the availability internationally of a plethora of new products at previously unimaginable prices, a large resource that the domestic entrepreneurs were quick to tap. Finally, six months ago, the Government slashed both customs and excise duties on computers and their components.

The synergetic effect of these four factors—cheap products available abroad, easy imports, liberal licensing and lowered duties—has brought about the sudden burst of activity in the computer market. And typically, it is the small-scale entrepreneur rather than the larger, more organised company, who has been able to capitalise on the new opportunities. Small-scale computer companies now outnumber the organised sector three to one; and while many of them function at insignificant levels of operation, most of the growth last year took place in this sector while the organised sector stagnated. In fact, many of the larger companies (like HCL) saw their sales of small computers decline and the industry grapevine says that at least two of the bigger computer companies, hit by falling prices, are no longer breaking even.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Mini-computers being assembled: unprecedented growth

As the competition hots up and a price war rages, the dirty tricks brigade seems to have taken over in many companies jostling for a secure niche in the market, so that charges and countercharges fill the air. The big companies accuse smaller ones of importing complete sub- assemblies and flourishing on the basis of "screw-driver technology", but in a typical rejoinder Vinay Rai of Usha Micro-process Controls argues that "I do as much or as little genuine manufacturing as the biggest companies in the field". One company accuses another of stealing its orders in the mail, another accuses a computer giant of hawking here what its parent company abroad had tried to market internationally, and failed. And almost every company disputes every other

THE GOVERNMENT

Quiet Change

COMPUTER advertisements now fill magazine pages. But the real computer revolution in India is taking place quietly, and in an unlikely organisation: the Government. For, believe it or not, the Central Government is computerising rapidly, and soon the state governments will be too.

In three years, if things go to plan, every joint secretary in every ministry in Delhi may have a computer terminal in his office. Every secretary to the Government will have a computer monitor console. At the touch of a button, these senior officials will be able to recall information without having to hunt out dusty files or have an army of clerks pour over figures to compile meaningful aggregates.

The process has already started. Twenty mini-computers have been installed in as many secretariat offices, and more are on the way. Forty of the 53 departments in the Central Government have started the computerisation process, ranging from the Finance Ministry's tabulation of revenue and expenditure to the Commerce Ministry's monitoring of imports and exports.

In a parallel move, the public sector Computer Maintenance Corporation (CMC) is setting up a semi-commercial computer network for public use. This network, known as Indonet, will comprise computer booths across the country that can be used, among others, by small businesses which may not be able to afford their own computer. The Reserve Bank is getting set to use Indonet to computerise all bank clearing operations.

At the heart of the Government's giant interconnected network of data management is the National Informatics Centre (NIC). Set up five years ago, the NIC in 1980 acquired a mammoth Rs 4 crore super-computer, the Cyber 170/730, with the capacity to do four million calculations per second and store three billion bytes of memory. Housed in the vast Pushpa Bhavan complex at the southern outskirts of Delhi, the NIC is organising the Government of India's quiet computer revolution—with an annual budget of no more than Rs 1.5 crore.

The results are already visible. As NIC Director N. Seshagiri points out, foreign trade figures have traditionally been six months out of date. The NIC has cut this delay to one month. Central budgets used to be drawn up on the basis of data till September of the previous year. With computerisation, information is now available till the end of December, making budgetary estimates that much more accurate and reliable.

Says Seshagiri: "With NIC's computer network spreading, the Government will have at its fingertips the basic statistics needed as a tool for effective decision-making. And it will be able to use this information for constant analysis of problems, and develop a full-fledged management information system."

The NIC director emphasises the practical uses of readily available data. He is already working out a correlation between meteorological trends and water availability, checking crop production in areas where irrigation investment has been made, and studying the changing crop patterns. The daily performance of power plants is being monitored, while key performance indices are being tracked for all public sector undertakings.

Seshagiri claims that NIC's work has already started "modulating government decisions in a tangible way". He cites the case of better inter-regional power planning. "If such infrastructural systems are able to improve their efficiency by even a fraction, NIC will have paid for itself many times over."

On a less elevated plane, the Government had simply lost track of the hundreds of organisations to which it had given loans. The NIC has been able to put the list together, and send out periodic reminders about overdue repayments.

Stage one of the computerisation programme is now virtually over, and the NIC is getting set for the next phase: bringing the state governments into the network with the help of satellite computers in each state capital. Work has begun with Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, and every state is expected to be roped in by 1985, using INSAT's satellite facilities.

Already, 250 government servants at the Centre have been trained in the use of mini-computers. Another 250 will soon start training, while 1,000 employees of the state governments will be similarly computer-educated so that the system can function smoothly.

—T.N. NINAN

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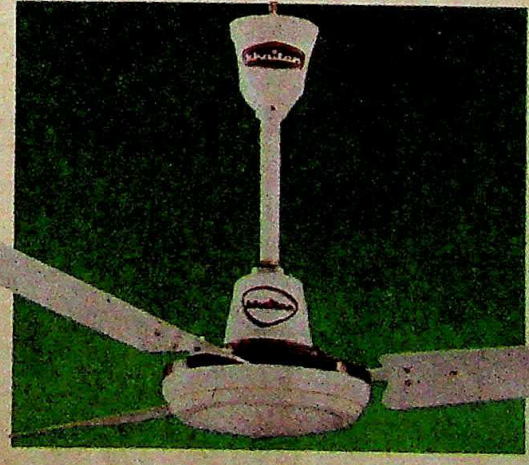
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*Data given for Khaitan Premium 1200 mm (48") sweep.

khaitan The real No.1 fan

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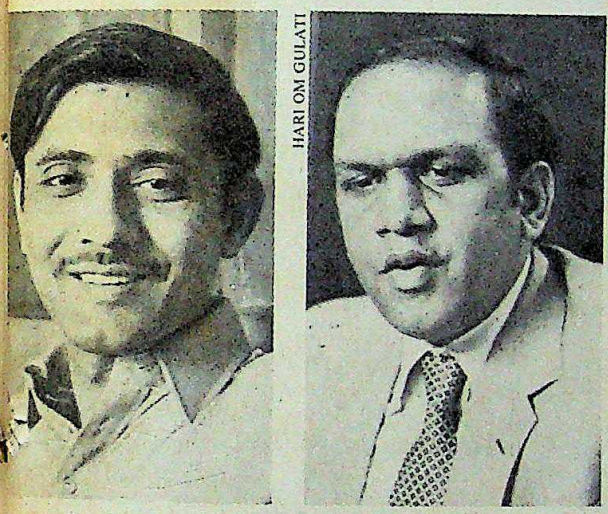
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ompany's sales figures in an effort to claim rimacy in the market.

One Bombay-based company marke- ng home computers was in fact denied a anufacturing licence by the Government, d survives by using licences issued to other ntrepreneurs; others are accused by their vals of indulging in import fiddles; and ere is no disputing that the smuggling in of oftware packages is rampant (imports of oftware are banned).

It is also clear that numerous small com- anies are introducing products that have een discarded by the computer giants broad, getting them at distress sale prices. HCL spokesman argued that many of ese companies would not be able to conti- ue servicing their Indian clients since spare



HARI OM GULATI

Bishnoi and Rai: aiming at a new market

rts would become unavailable abroad. d a DCM spokesman contended that the overnment had allowed the import-fuelled owth because it wanted to show rapid owth of the industry: "Everyone was criti- ng the Government for its failure in the ld of computers. So it has allowed free im- rts that give an artificial boost to domestic oduction figures. The whole thing is an ab- ute rip-off."

There have been other charges: of com- nies making unwarranted claims about computing power of their machines, of or servicing of machines, and of a resul- t customer backlash. The company most quently mentioned in this context is HCL, an HCL spokesman attributed this to "in- try jealousy at our success" and argued t "there are more complaints about HCL ause we have sold more machines than all others."

In their counterblast, the smaller com- nies charge that the established names in field have been cheating Indian custo- rs by charging exorbitant prices, and that as the entry of new companies that chan- this picture. Says Vinay Rai of Usha Mi- croprocess Controls: "Till we entered the market a year ago, some companies were charging prices that were three times their cost; and they were getting away with it because the customer did not know better. Once we entered the picture, the other computer companies had to slash their prices by more than half."

Computer costs may have dropped, but prices remain much too high in the country: Prime Home Computers is marketing a Texas Instruments system for Rs 13,000 although the original product used to sell for $300 (Rs 3,000) in the US. In fact, shortly before Texas Instruments wound up its small computer business, the price had dropped to $90 (Rs 900). Prime's Bishnoi argues, however, that "it is unfair to compare our prices with those abroad: we have to pay fairly steep customs and excise duties, apart from meeting our overheads and other costs, like dealer margins".

He also contends that duty levels will have to drop still further if a mass market for computers is to be developed. But other things are required too: the proper development of software packages that will help customers to make efficient use of their machines, more extensive servicing networks, basic customer education, and an end to the critical shortage of personnel who can man the computer companies.

At the upper end of the market, the problems are of an altogether different nature: for a start, the Government is yet to finalise a technology tie-up for the indigenous manufacture of large, mainframe computers (which has been reserved for the public sector). And in the software business, where the potential for exports is unlimited because of the country's availability of cheap technical manpower, there is all too little activity taking place. Many of the companies that want to get moving quickly in these and other areas, have, as a consequence, decided to base a part of their operations abroad: the Tatas, HCL and DCM have already done so, and others may rapidly follow the example that has been set.

For all the problems, however, there is no denying that the computer market has come alive, and that it is growing at a pace unknown before. Over the next two to three years with more manufacturers stepping into the fray, and new classes of customers switching to the use of computers, there should, it is hoped, be still more growth and a confident, if rather confused, entry into the computer age.

—T.N. NINAN

GUJARAT

Boat Busting

EXACTLY one year ago the Kotanjoj crept up the Gujarat coast to Alang in Bhavnagar district. For the 4,800 tonne cargo vessel the haul was to be its last journey. Soon after it was beached the crew fell in line, saluted the ship and quietly walked off for the last time.

In the past year such scenes have been re-enacted numerous times. When the first ship was beached on February 13,1983, Alang was an unknown beach in the middle of nowhere. Today the hulks of 52 ships are lined up waiting for the ship-breakers. Within the short span of a year Alang has captured nearly 80 per cent of the ship-breaking business in the country. In its first 10 months 46 ships have been dismantled yielding a turnover of over Rs 100 crore. By March 1985 it expects to break down another 120 ships which should push up its turnover to close to Rs 300 crore.

Inevitably the ship-breaking business has changed Alang beyond recognition. Today nearly three kilometres of the beach are strewn with huge chunks of steel, wood and other scrap. Beached ships are in various stages of being broken down. Over 70 truckloads of metal scrap leave the yard every day. And over 6,000 people, many coming from as far away as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra, have found employment in the yards. Many of the local fishermen have also abandoned their traditional professions to join the yards. Each labourer earns anywhere between Rs 900 and Rs 1,800 every month.

The overnight growth of Alang owes a lot to the Gujarat Government's ability to see an opportunity and grab it with both hands. The whole venture began almost by chance when a ship-breaker from Sachana in Jamnagar wrote to state Finance Minister Sanat Mehta pleading for a ship-breaking yard somewhere in Gujarat. Mehta decided to follow up the suggestion and met ship-breakers first in Sachana and then in Darukhana in Bombay. He was impressed by the enthusiastic response he got. Many ship-breakers in Bombay said that they were more than willing to shift to Gujarat if they got the right incentives.

Mehta soon discovered that ship- breaking is profitable business to get into. The environment and infrastructure requirements are minimal, the gestation period is short and the industry is labour-intensive. Moreover, because of the world-wide recession in the shipping industry, ships are being sold at throw-away prices. In fact the state Government has spent only Rs 33 lakh to set up the Alang yard. Marvels Balkrishna Das-

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SANAT JHAVERI



The Alang ship-breaking yard: a fortune in scrap

gupta a leading ship-breaker: "Alang is a government miracle."

Once the state Government decided to get into the business, the most difficult problem was to choose the right site for it. The search ended in Alang which was ideal as it had a wide tidal range from zero at low tide to 17 feet at high tide. An added advantage was that the gradient of the beach was such that ships once beached would not slip back even at high tide. Says Harshad Kamdar, vice-presadent of the Iron and Steel Scrap Association of India: "A group of ship-breakers who inspected Alang in August 1982 were convinced of its tremendous potential. We fell in love with Alang at first sight."

OUT OF the first 46 ship-breakers at Alang, only 15 are old-timers in the business. The rest are entrepreneurs attracted by the growing industry. Initially, banks were hesitant to give loans but are now giving loans of nearly Rs 65 lakh to each ship-breaker. And the high profits are attracting others. At the moment, as many as 40 ship-breakers are in the queue to have ships allotted to them for breaking.

This enthusiasm is easy to understand. A ship-breaker buys a 5,000-tonne ship for around Rs 50 lakh, pays Rs 40 lakh as customs duty and another Rs 25 lakh on labour. It takes around 6 months to break a ship. By the end of the job the ship-breaker can expect to weigh in with a net profit of around Rs 30 lakh. To keep costs down to a bare minimum only gas cutting equipment using oxygen is employed to break down a ship. Most ship-breakers avoid using cranes and other rigs to cut down overheads.

Speed is of the essence in the ship-breaking industry. Many ship-breakers feel that they could get more for the fittings on their ships but they do not find it worth their while to sift through the items on board checking their value. As a result a whole range of consumer goods left on board by the crew is carelessly destroyed. The costly fittings on the ships also suffer the same fate in the hands of the illiterate workers.

More oddly a whole range of expensive items including telephones, TVs, refrigerators, electric generators, wireless sets and radar are sold to scrap-mongers by weight. Surprisingly, Government departments have not responded to efforts to interest them in such goods, though for instance they could easily use the wireless sets on board. In fact the Customs go to great lengths to destroy wireless sets which often cost around Rs 2 lakh. After ensuring that the sets can never be used again the Customs then levy a duty of Rs 30,000 on them. Says ship-breaker Jitendra Shah: "Is it not strange that the Government does not want to take our sophisticated wireless sets even though we want to donate them?" Captain N. Sundereshan, a maritime surveyor who identified Alang as a potential ship-breaking yard, adds: "Ship-breakers can save a lot of money by working systematically and identifying suitable markets for consumer goods."

In fact the ship-breakers occasionally find that saving anything on board ship only lands them in trouble. One ship-breaker, Munnabhai Agarwal had the police hounding him after he donated rare life-saving drugs to a local hospital. Says Agarwal: "I have decided never to donate anything from the ships I break. The Government can save lakhs of rupees."

The sudden spurt of business at Alang has rejuvenated 19 re-rolling mills in Bhavnagar which were closed for lack of raw material. All 19 have now reopened because of the steel scrap flowing in from Alang. Another 80 mills elsewhere in the state have also been given a fresh lease of life by the yard.

Ship-breaking is flourishing in underdeveloped countries like Taiwan and Pakistan where cheap labour is available in plenty. Alang also depends on much the same advantages. In addition it chose the right time to get into the business when the shipping industry has sunk into a deep recession. One indication of the plight of the shipping industry is that in 1973-74 the Metal Scrap Trade Corporation which buys ships for breaking imported only seven ships weighing 28,429 tonnes. In 1981-82 the corporation bought as many as 40 ships weighing a total of 1.9 lakh tonnes. Says Vallabh Shah, executive engineer, ports: "The very fact that Alang has succeeded in such a short time should encourage the Government to look out for other areas where ship-breaking yards can be set up."

The workers are also making long-term plans in the hope that the industry will flourish. They have begun organising and demanding better conditions. Though there are about 6,000 workers in the yards they have only minimal facilities. There is also room for improving safety conditions. Recently a worker was killed when an oxygen cylinder burst in the yard.

While the ship-breakers are all praise for the state Government they are not so charitable towards the Centre. They frequently raise the complaint that the Centre charges a Rs 2.5 lakh surcharge on every ship but does nothing for the industry. Says Kamdar: "Why does the Central Government place this surcharge when they are not doing any developmental work for the yard? It has no justification and should be immediately scrapped."

The businessmen are confident that given the right kind of help they can expand Alang tremendously. Their dream is to catch up with Taiwan. Mehta who pays periodic visits to Alang is equally optimistic, and says: "Alang succeeded beyond our expectations. All we did was to take active interest and make things move. The ship-breakers did the rest. With more facilities Alang can gradually grow into one of the biggest ship yards in the world." But while everyone shares this mood of optimism the big question that hangs over Alang is whether its good fortunes will dry up if the shipping recession ends.

—RAMESH MENON in Alang

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Cheese goes grate with pasta.

Ravioli, lasagne, cannelloni, spaghetti, macaroni, noodles, vermicelli ... that's pasta (paste in Italian) for you. Made from a semolina or wheat flour, the dough is kneaded into all sorts of shapes, dried, and combined with a wide variety of meats, vegetables and sauces. As a main dish with tomato salad on the side, it is nutritious, inexpensive and quick to make. Pasta connoisseurs like theirs 'al dente', something they can sink their teeth into.

A pasta 'al burro' is simply tossed in butter and topped with freshly grated cheese.

Ah, yes! Pasta without cheese would be like Italy without Leonardo da Vinci.

A simple rule for pasta: grate the cheese. So the food can absorb its flavour uniformly when baked.

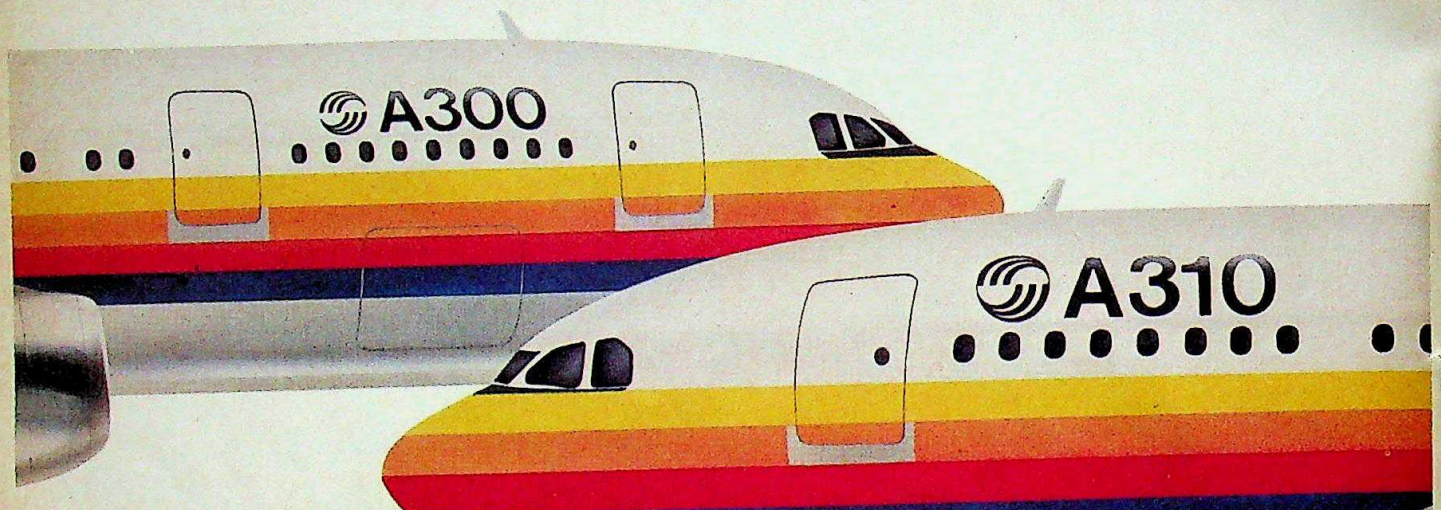
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CHER GOODEARTH

Rescue Operation

THE PROPOSAL was startling. Indian tractor and diesel engine manufacturer Eicher Goodearth Ltd rnover: over Rs 80 crore) would take over German namesake Eicher Traktoren und ndmaschinen Werk(net worth: DM 8 million, or Rs 3.2 crore), floundering in the dession. After the bureaucrats had stopped ping, they gave the go-ahead. Last month, ter two years of playing nursemaid, Eicher odearth could take a well-earned breaer. Says Managing Director Vikram Lall, "The project is proceeding as envisaged. e have cut losses and this year we should eak even. We have already established an sembly line with tractor components imrted from India." What made the achievent sweeter was that, 24 years ago, the dian firm had started off by manufactug tractors under a seven-year collaboran agreement with Eicher Traktoren—w, it was returning the compliment by ming to its parent company's rescue.

Eicher Goodearth is going full steam ead with its so far successful attempt to ll a western engineering company out of mire. It has invested as much as Rs 2 re in the company—through loans from ign banks—and has acquired a majority re of the company's equity base. It also ns to export about Rs 50 lakh worth of mponents to Germany in 1985, and will to up the export pace by several times r five years.

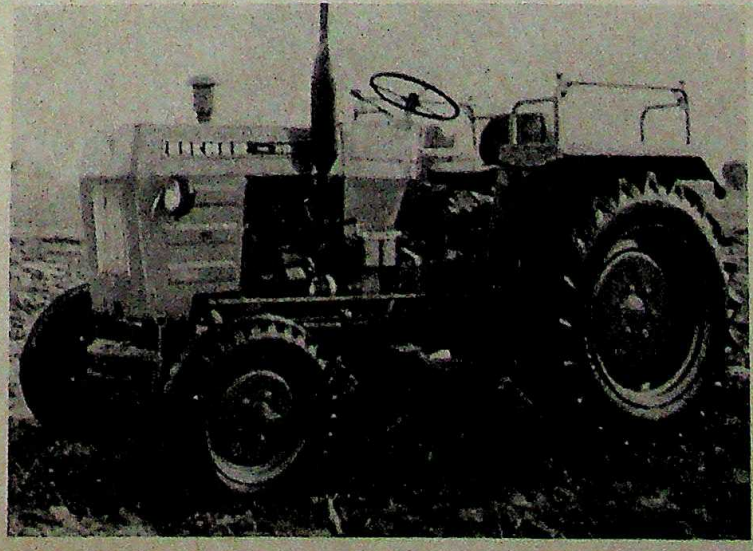
The fall-out from Eicher Goodearth's g-range rescue operation, company exeives point out, is not confined to the man tractor manufacturer. The basic sequence, they hope, will be to establish credibility of Indian exports and expor- and to wipe out at least some of the ma of unreliability that has gged Indian suppliers—not wiut reason. Explains Subodh rgava, executive director, Eicr Goodearth: "We think it's go- to be a tremendous achievent, not just for us, but also for ian engineering companies. It uld also be in time for us to pro- m at the coming Hanover fair."

The story has its beginnings rly three decades ago, when the t Eicher tractors were brought India. After the collaboration ween the Indian and the man firm ended the fortunes of her Traktoren went steadily nhill thereafter, and it was taken over by Massey Ferguson of Canada. Massey had plants in Britain and France, and wanted a production nucleus in West Germany.

But things did not go quite as well as they should have. For one, the power unit of the tractors was changed from the original Eicher engine to the Perkins engine, a shift that didn't go down very well with German consumers. Secondly, Eicher did not work very well as an integrated unit within the Massey combine—decision making, for instance, took an excessively long time, flowing from Germany to England to Canada and back down the line.

When Massey Ferguson was itself hit by the recession, it decided to rid itself of its German unit, which was by the early '80s making outsize losses of around DM16 million (Rs 6.4 crore). It was at this point that Eicher Goodearth entered onstage with an offer to Massey to take over the management of the recession-mired Eicher Traktoren. Says Bhargava: "We spent a month there in early 1981. Finally we decided we could bring it around and asked Massey, why don't you assign management responsibility to us?"





Lall (left) at site and (below) Eicher's tractor: ambitious project

Massey, it appears, was only too glad to have somebody take a losing proposition off its hands, and the Indian firm took up the gauntlet in the first quarter of 1982. "It was an unusual plea," remembers Lall, "and it took some time for the Government to get used to it. But there were no obstacles put in our way once they recognised the logic and the aim of our plans."

Lall is no stranger to Germany. He studied engineering there and also worked at Eicher Traktoren as an apprentice for two years. He knew a lot of the German way of working and was able to get his management ideas accepted by his German counterparts. They were simple: restore its integrity to the product—Eicher tractors, powered by Eicher engines, serviced by Eicher personnel. As the first components went out from India to feed the assembly line thousands of miles away, Eicher executives kept their fingers crossed. But the losses fell to around DM 2 million in 1982-83.

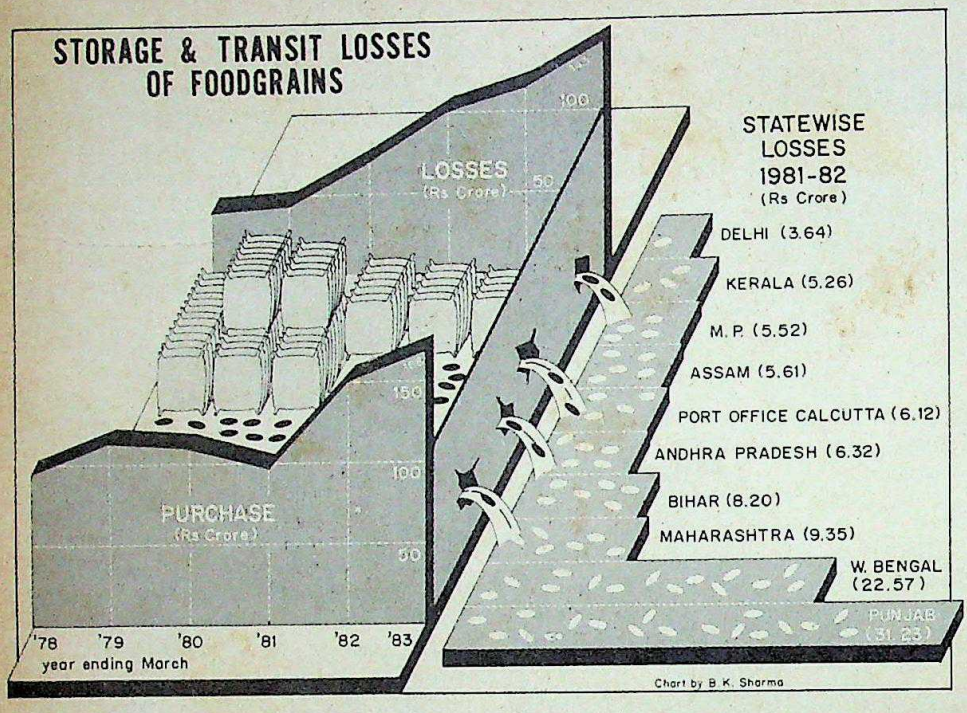
Eicher Traktoren currently turns out 600 tractors a year, a pinprick when compared to the biggest German tractor manufacturer Deutz, which brings out 20,000 of the machines annually. Deutz naturally has the largest share of the tractor market in the country, about 19 per cent. Eicher for the moment has just 3.6 per cent, though this is an improvement on its 1982 share of 2.4 per cent. Says Lall: "We hope to increase this to 6 per cent in 1985. We have to even out the rough ends, but with both ends now under one corporate roof it should not be difficult."

Eicher executives feel that the biggest obstacle to their project are what they see as the inordinate export delays, and the vast differences in export rates. The airfreight rates from Frankfurt to Delhi are less than half those in the other direction, basically because of freight consolidation problems. Shipping consignments have to be planned at least two and a half months in advance to ensure untroubled passage.

For the moment, things appear to be going well. But Lall knows, as do all the others involved in what must surely be a unique effort by an Indian company, that a lot more has to be done before Eicher's namesake gets going on its own. With a little help from friends. —JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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FOOD CORPORATION OF INDIA

The Grain Drain

IT LOSES Rs 35 lakh worth of foodgrain every day in transit and storage alone. But nobody has yet been brought to book for it. Only a public sector leviathan like the Food Corporation of India (FCI) could keep running up such losses and still stay in business. In 1983 it lost over 7 lakh tonnes of foodgrain worth nearly Rs 140 crore. Since 1980 it has lost nearly 25 lakh tonnes of grain—nearly as much as it supplied Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh from the Central pool last year.

The FCI's sloppy performance has of late attracted plenty of sharp criticism. Last fortnight the Government had to ward off a barrage of questions in both houses of Parliament about the corporation's inability to keep a check on losses. The questions revealed that losses in transit and storage more than doubled in the last few years. In 1977-78 the FCI was losing 2.93 lakh tonnes—or 2.53 per cent of its sales. By 1982-83 this had climbed to 7.40 lakh tonnes—nearly 5.1 per cent of total sales.

According to unofficial estimates this year's losses are likely to be over 8 lakh tonnes when the stock verification reports are finalised. Says Union Minister of State for Food and Civil Supplies Bhagwat Jha Azad: "Yes, I feel strongly concerned about the growing losses of foodgrains during FCI's operations. I want the FCI to identify the culprits and give them exemplary punishment so that these losses are reduced. Keeping in view the massive operations, some losses are natural but there should be some norms to justify huge leakages." Adds FCI Chairman Sawai Singh Sisodia: "On the face of it, the figures appear to be startling. We are also looking into the factors to plug the pilferages. But one should not overlook the efforts involved in handling over 20 million tonnes of foodgrain annually."

The Government has shown its displeasure at reports of maladministration in the FCI in no uncertain terms. Last year it refused to pay Rs 50 crore claimed by the corporation as subsidy for losses sustained during storage and transit. Food Ministry officials defend their action saying that the corporation has to always justify any losses over 1 per cent.

Officials of the FCI on the other hand protest that they cannot keep an effective check on operations when foodgrain is bought from 5,000 centres and distributed at over 1,000 points all over the country. Says Sisodia: "A bag of wheat is handled at 10 different points before it is stored after purchasing it from a farmer. In the absence of any strict vigilance it loses weight a little bit."

But that little bit may be just a bit too much. FCI foodgrain is pilfered at practically every point along its slow journey from the mandis to shops around the country. More often than not the grain is 'underweighed' when it is bought. After that pilferage takes place in open railway wagons on the way to the godowns, in the godowns themselves and also while being transferred from one godown to another. And finally it often ends up being 'overweighed' at the distribution point.

The biggest problem is the way huge amounts—nearly 60 per cent of its losses—vanish while it is being transported from one point to another. Transit losses have zoomed from 1.69 lakh tonnes in 1977-78 to 5.14 lakh tonnes in 1982-83. FCI rules stipulate that each bag of grain must be weighed twice—once before loading at the procurement centre and the second time when it is unloaded at the godown. The Food Ministry reckons that six out of 10 bags contain less when they are weighed the second time.

The tricks played on the FCI are often brazen and illustrate how easy it is to swindle the corporation. In one instance last year during a surprise check in Delhi the FCI discovered that it was using sacks that could only hold 98 kg of wheat when they were supposed to hold 100 kg. Food Ministry sources estimate that the FCI may have lost anywhere near 4 lakh tonnes this way alone during the last two years.

Rather belatedly after the check the FCI ordered its supplier to make their gunny bags at least half an inch bigger. Admits Sisodia: "We were under the impression that we were being supplied a 100 kg capacity bag".

Food Ministry studies also show that the FCI loses heavily while transferring grain from one godown to another. It is a major part of FCI's job to ensure that there are sufficient food stocks all over the country but it pays a heavy price for it.

The heaviest losses are in states where a large quantity of foodgrain is procured. For example, 1.67 lakh tonnes of foodgrain worth Rs 31.22 crore was lost during 1981-82 in Punjab. West Bengal came not too far behind with losses of 1.24 lakh tonnes of grain worth Rs 22.57 crore (*see chart*). Says a Food Ministry official: "Both states are abnormal. In Punjab, FCI officials accepted foodgrain from aggressive farmers without proper weighing; in West Bengal they allowed the trade union mafia to loot the foodgrain."

Since the corporation is rather slow about totting up its accounts it took over two to three years to work out how much was lost while being transported from one depot to another. FCI auditors have pointed out that dozens of wagons do not appear to have reached their destinations. The FCI audit report for 1981-82 says: "In reconciling the inter-depot movement of foodgrain and other commodities (excluding fertilisers) valued at Rs 3,290.46 crore, the missing wagons and unconnected wagons were of the value of Rs 52.18 crore and Rs 52.77 crore respectively."

Storage losses are in another category altogether. They have not risen as sharply as transit losses but they are quite enough to cause alarm. In 1977-78 the FCI was losing

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4 lakh tonnes. This had risen to 2.26 lakh nes in 1982-83. But storage losses are ecially embarrassing for the corporation ce they nearly always take place with the nivance of FCI staff.

N SOME depots the losses are appallingly high and the corporation does little to stop it. For example between 1977 and 1 over 24,000 tonnes of wheat worth over 4 crore was either stolen or damaged in FCI's open storage depot at Chharrah in st Bengal. In another open storage depot Andel in West Bengal the FCI has lost 736 tonnes of wheat worth over Rs 2 crore to theft or damage.

Oddly enough, though the FCI was ng heavily in Chharrah no senior official r thought it necessary to visit the depot an inspection. And though the FCI blamed West Bengal police and the lack of adete security for the loss it could not exin why local FCI officials had delayed reting the large-scale thefts to their head of-. Also while 30 complaints of theft were d against 152 people the cases are still ding. Final reports have only been filed 2 cases and even in these no action has n taken against anyone.

Similarly in Andel no action has been n against any officials. Union Agricul- Minister Rao Birendra Singh remarked e files as far back as 1981 that he was rised to find that despite orders the FCI had not taken action against erring officials.



Azad and Sisodia: tackling losses

Sisodia, however, says that altogether nearly 800 employees were charge-sheeted in 1983 but claims that he does not know how many of these have been hauled up for theft and pilferage of foodgrain. But it is fairly common knowledge that the FCI has been avoiding taking strict action against employees responsible for the staggering losses. Even the Public Accounts Committee report in 1981 very pointedly noted that out of 125 cases of theft reported between 1977 and 1980 the FCI had blandly offered the explanation that investigations were in progress in 38 cases. In 83 cases of theft it had stated that the thefts took place because Chharrah storage depot and the Kalyan airstrip in Maharashtra were "surrounded by bad characters who came out in the darkness with lethal weapons and attacked the CAP (covered area plinth) storage".

The FCI seems oddly reluctant to take serious measures to punish anyone. It has in fact promoted some officials who are facing disciplinary inquiries. One conspicuous example is the deputy zonal manager (south) who faces disciplinary proceedings and who has been asked to officiate as zonal manager.

The FCI's inaction has also prompted the Government to take its own steps. Soon after Azad took over as minister he forced the former FCI managing director S.K.S. Chib to proceed on long leave.

In addition the Food Department issued a spate of directions aimed at cutting losses. For a start it ordered that the corporation should build more covered storage space. It also directed the corporation to improve vigilance and take strict action against erring officials. Soon afterwards a high-powered group headed by K.V. Seshadri, a former additional secretary was appointed to make a study of the FCI's problems.

The report has pointed out serious loopholes in the FCI's storage and transport system. Its recommendations are being examined by the Food Department. Says Azad: "We have initiated steps to bring down losses to a bare minimum. Once we implement the report we will be able to successfully achieve our goal."

But if the fate of other reports is any indication, this one is also likely to end up being shelved. And the millions of tonnes of foodgrain bought by the FCI will continue to be at the mercy of thieves, unscrupulous traders and corrupt officials. —PRABHU CHAWLA

AUSTRALIAN WHEAT

Deadly Buffer

FOOD Ministry officials have a problem. They are finding it difficult to dispose of over 7 lakh tonnes of Australian wheat worth Rs 135 crore imported during 1981-83. The Union Government imported the wheat to build up a buffer stock in the wake of growing offtake by state governments, but the FCI could not issue a single kilogram of Australian wheat. The reason: excessive insecticide residue of 10 PPM.

According to the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act (PFA), no foodgrains can be sold in India if they contain more than 0.05 PPM. Although 10 PPM is acceptable in international operations the lower level was fixed for India because of Indian human body conditions. Interestingly, the Union Government bought over 70 lakh tonnes of wheat from other countries such as USA, Canada, and Argentina which contain a higher insecticide residue of 4 to 5 PPM but the Indian purchasing team, inexplicably, bought Australian wheat at the highest FOB cost of $181 per metric tonne as against $167 for American wheat and $150 for Argentinian wheat. In the winter session of Parliament, the Government admitted that Australian wheat could not be sold because of higher residue.

The FCI officials discovered the lacuna only when the wheat with detailed specifications was delivered to them in 1981. If they had released the wheat in the market, they could have been hauled up under PFA. While Food Ministry officials were pondering the problem, the Australian wheat was being damaged, firstly at the ports and then in the FCI's godowns. According to the FCI sources, over 1.25 lakh tonnes of Australian wheat is not fit for human consumption. Another 1 lakh tonnes has been converted from A category to D category. According to the FCI's norms, D category wheat, though damaged, can be used for human consumption if it is mixed with sound wheat.

The Food Department approached the Health Ministry to amend the PFA so that an insecticidal residue of more than 0.2 PPM was permitted in wheat. But Health Ministry expressed its inability to relax the PFA for the sake of FCI. Says a Health Ministry official: "If we do it for FCI, we will be taking the risk of flooding the market with wheat which is rotten but has been made fit for human consumption with an excessive dose of fenitrothion (an insecticide)."

But the Food Ministry found a way out. It appointed a four-member committee headed by T.V. Vijayshekaran, additional secretary, food—responsible for wheat imports—to find out ways to dispose of the wheat. The committee recommended that over 5 lakh tonnes be allotted to the mill owners with instructions to grind Australian wheat after mixing it with sound A category wheat in the proportion of 3:1.

The process of distributing wheat can start only when the insecticidal residue comes down to a level of 0.2. At present it has been reduced to 5 PPM level but before it comes down to a permissible level, the Central Government's primary objective of importing wheat to supplement domestic supplies would have been lost. Thankfully while the country has lost crores, no one has really suffered because of this costly error of commercial judgement.

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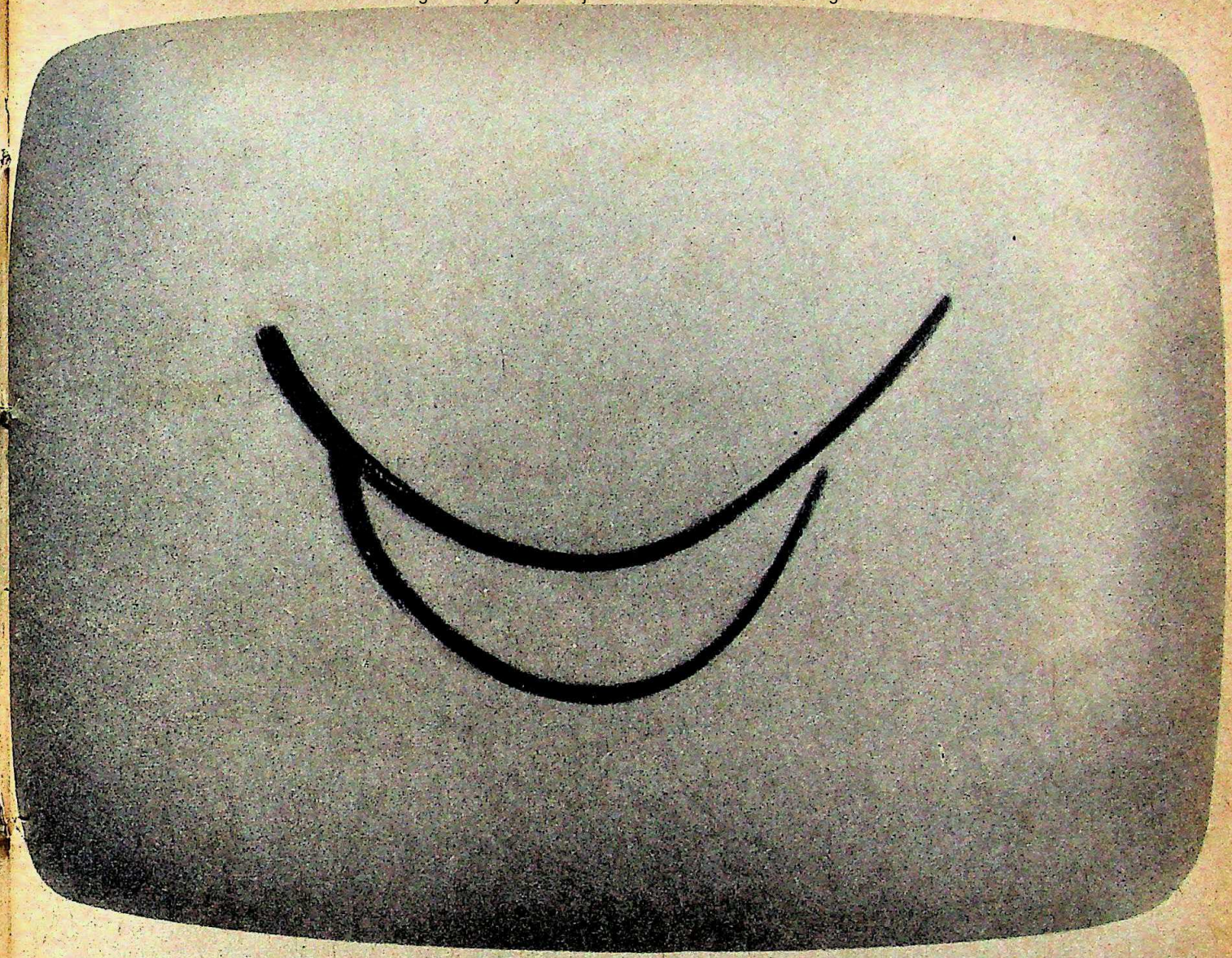
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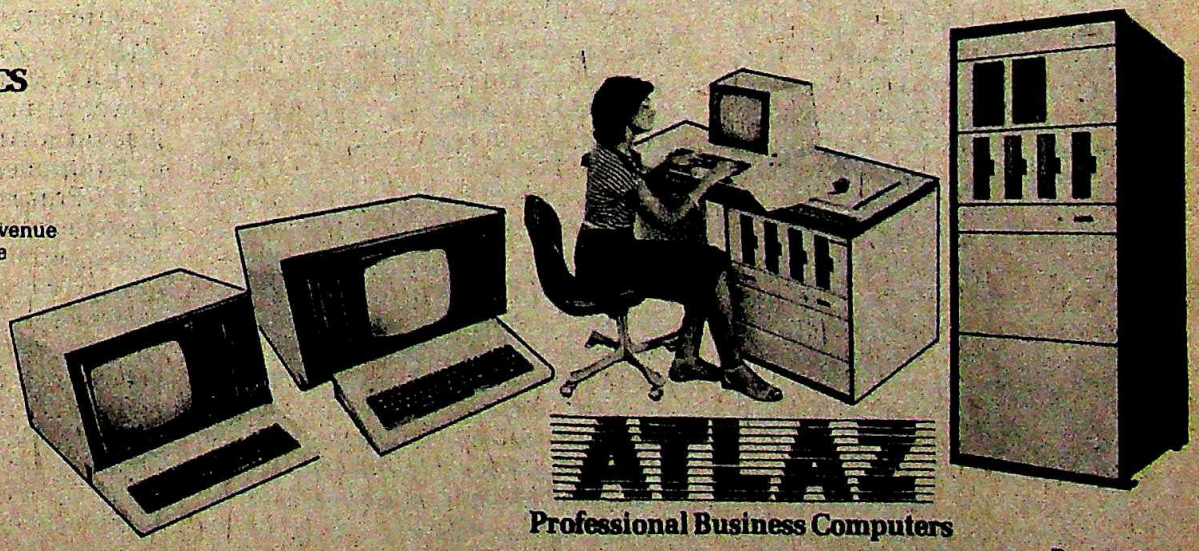


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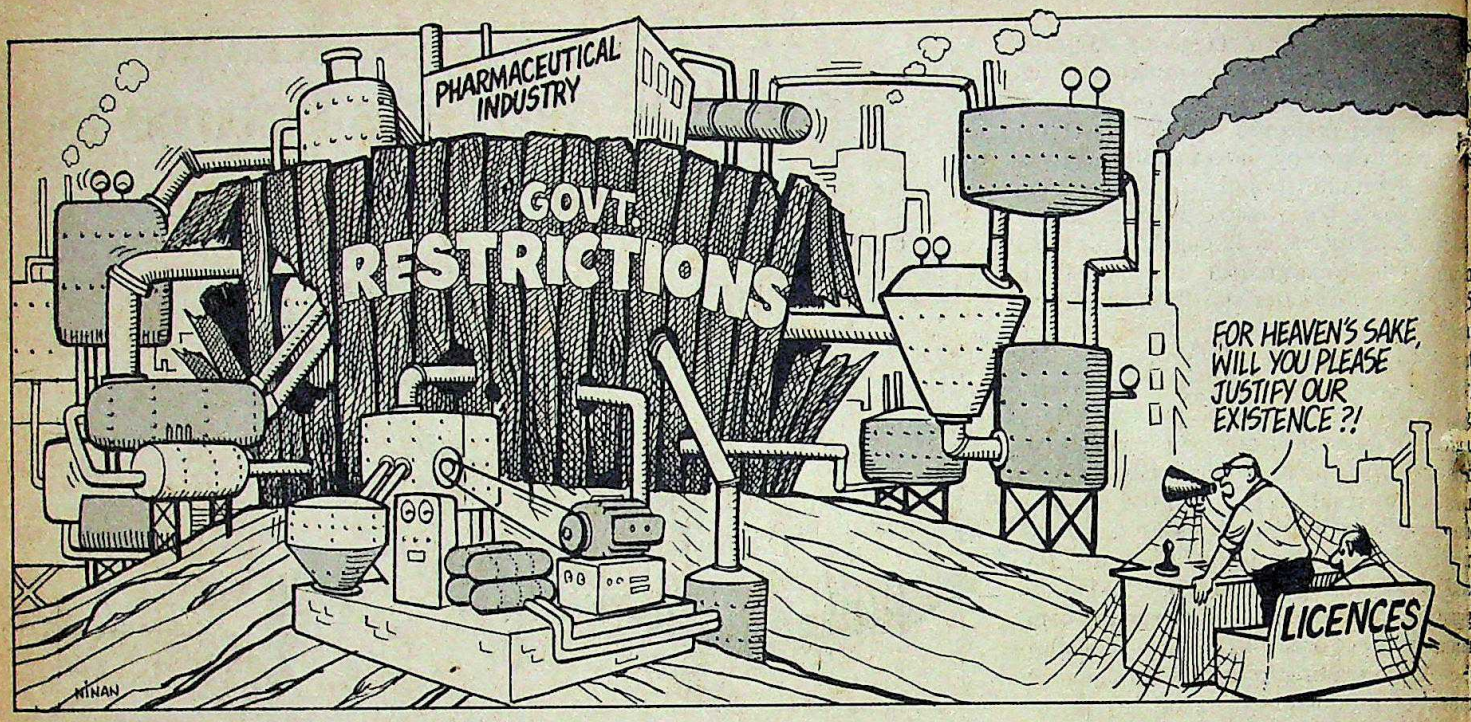


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DRUG INDUSTRY

Carrying On Regardless

ON PAPER it is the most heavily regulated industry in India, and pharmaceuticals manufacturers lose no opportunity to moan about "stringent controls". But the submission last month of the government-constituted National Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Development Council's (NDDC) 52-page working group report on industrial approvals and licensing brought home once again that while the Government's efforts at controlling the industry have been unremitting, the results prove them to be toothless or counter-productive.

At one level, the industry's growth has certainly slowed down; at another, the clumsy price control mechanism has brought about a stoppage of production of numerous drugs while, in cases, the companies have in one way or another got around the price curbs; at yet a third level, there is much befuddling of the question of what is high technology, and what isn't. In sum, the industry has responded to the controls with both subterfuge and plain defiance, and the NDDC's report brings this out with telling force. Blatantly violating the Industries (Development and Regulation) Act, 1952 (IDRA) curbs on unbridled or lopsided growth, multinational and large-scale Indian drug manufacturers alike have installed machinery, expanded product lines and introduced thousands of new products without bothering to obtain the statutory industry licences. And despite repeated criticisms by numerous high-powered committees and the stringent 'New Drug Policy' of 1978 the Government appears both unable and unwilling to take the powerful industry to task.

The working group report is the latest in a list of "whitewash" efforts by the Government which tacitly acknowledges that regulatory attempts have had little effect, and points out that future curbs will be equally difficult to enforce. A tough stand towards past violators of IDRA requirements, argues the report, "may give rise to many practical problems as some of the formulations are essential...prosecutions would be difficult to sustain and long-drawn-out". Crowed a spokesman of the resourceful multinational drug producers' lobby: "The matter of licensing violations is so complicated that the Government has never been able to take any action against manufacturers. It is almost impossible to prove conclusively that a manufacturer has produced beyond his licensed capacity or that he does not have a valid licence."

When the act was passed in March 1952 existing producers were required to register themselves with the Government and received registration certificates which merely listed them as "drugs and pharmaceuticals" manufacturers with neither product lines nor capacity limitations laid down. Although few pre-1952 manufacturers are in existence today, many manufacturers state that they acquired the business of old companies with this blanket right to manufacture drugs.

The Indian subsidiary of American giant Pfizer, for instance, acquired Dumex and now justifies the hugely expanded manufacture of its Becosules on the grounds that the Dumex registration certificate had no stated capacity. Said Pfizer liaison man D.C. Shah: "Since Dumex was acquired by Pfizer we automatically got an unbridled licence under which we could introduce any item classified as a drug. Similarly there are several hundred such registration certificates and permission letters on which capacities are not defined."

In 1962 the possibilities for exploitation ambiguity increased when the Government issued permission letters and no-objection certificates to many manufacturers and the situation was further confused by the 'Carry On Business' (COB) licences issued in 1970 and 1971 to make up for past lapses in regulation. In addition the Government has on many occasions announced regularisation schemes for companies which expanded production without valid licences, the most recent instance being 1982.

The result has been unauthorised expansion and growth in the drug industry on a scale which makes a mockery of pharmaceutical licensing. Among other things the drug industry today is accused of:

- Massive overproduction, in many cases more than 10 times the licensed production of drugs, which in many cases are non-essential formulations.
- The unauthorised installation of plant and machinery without approval under IDRA.
- The production of a huge number of drugs has never been approved under the act: in a scrutiny of just 29 manufacturers by the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers,

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discovered that a staggering 432 drug mulations were being manufactured wi-ut a shred of evidence to show that they ever been approved. A little over 100 of se were made by Indian companies and rest by multinationals.

The defences mounted by pharmaceuti- manufacturers lack conviction. Most mmon is the argument that the March 52 registration letters gave producers carte nche to introduce products and expand. t what industry spokesmen conveniently get is that in October 1952 all units with istration letters were notified that they uld not introduce any new products or stantially expand production without se-rate industrial licences for the purpose. e NDDC working group report states: "A y large number of formulations are clai-d by drug companies to be covered by the istration certificates. However the com-nies have not been able to submit conclusi-evidence relating to the date of commen-ment of production."

Arguments in support of production ond the licensed capacities are equally cious. In September 1971 American-own-multinational Abbott Laboratories recei- a COB licence for 1.8 million injectables, million tablets, 241,000 litres of liquids 11.7 tonnes of granules on its declara- that its Rs 7.5 lakh formulations plant producing these quantities. Although company did not apply for any expan- licence in the next decade, by 1982 Ab-t's injectables plant was almost three es larger than licensed, tablet capacity 265 per cent over, liquids stood at 304 cent of the licensed level, and granules ost three times over, and gross value of company's plant and machinery had wn over 26 times to Rs 1.98 crore.

OMPANY spokesmen insist that the growth in Abbott's production capa-city does not amount to "substantial ansion" as defined in IDRA, and the Go-ment obligingly re-endorsed the three-increase. "We were never in a position re we needed permission for expansion," a senior official. In Pfizer, the produc- rise from the licenced 14 tonnes of tetra-line to 66 tonnes is explained by the argu- that the company improved its chemi- processes without any increases in plant machinery.

But this argument is unlikely to work similar overproduction of 86 of the com-y's drug formulations, since formulating olves few if any chemical processes.

In Glaxo, similarly, installed capacities liquids, tablets and solids are six and t times higher than the licenced levels in the last three years alone the value of company's plant and machinery shot up

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by 82 per cent. In a reply tabled in the Lok Sabha last December, Minister of State for Chemicals and Fertilisers Ramchandra Rath disclosed that the company's unauthorised additions of plant and machinery had come to the notice of the Government only after Glaxo had been granted a licence allowing them substantial expansion. Similar cases are common in an industry notorious for misreporting and suppression of facts.

Companies like Burroughs Wellcome misled the ministry to gain a price for trimethroprim which was almost three times higher than what has now been fixed. Others like Wyeth Laboratories submitted incorrect data in order to gain high-technology classification for one of their products. And numerous companies like Warner Hindustan and Merck Sharpe and Dohme have been discovered to be selling their drugs at prices substantially higher than those fixed under the Drugs (Price Control) Order.

To complicate matters further last fortnight the Government was itself being accused of arbitrariness in the implementation of the licensing and re-endorsement policies. Pfizer's Shah argued that arbitrary conditions were imposed on different foreign companies while regularising excess production and hinted that Indian sector competitors were lobbying against multinationals.

The Indian companies meanwhile accused the Government of just the opposite. Citing the case of Sarabhai Chemicals which was refused re-endorsement of its Vitamin C production even though it manufactures the drug from the basic stage, spokesmen of the national drug companies argued that this was in stark contrast to Abbott, which received its re-endorsement even though it is only a tabletting company. Said J.B. Mody, former president of the Indian Drug Manufacturers Association: "The overall policy has to be implemented in the broad interests of the country. Abbott does not manufacture a single drug itself, it merely buys bulk and formulates it in violation of the new drug policy. So what was the rationale behind regularising Abbott's excess production?"

Meanwhile, a final decision on the recommendations of the working group on licensing will be taken after the NDDC compiles and submits comprehensive recommendations on pricing, licensing and planning to the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers next month. Manufacturers in the national sector of the industry however see the exercise as a mere cover-up job. "We have had a comprehensive drug policy since 1978," explained a leading Indian pharmaceuticals manufacturer, "but it has neither been implemented nor monitored and this process of handing it back to committee after committee is merely a stalling tactic."

—CHANDER UDAY SINGH

SWADESHI POLYTEX

Corporate Quarrel

LIKE wine, feuds in business families mature with the years. It was in this tradition that the decade-old quarrel in the Jaipuria family of Kanpur took a fresh turn last month, when Swadeshi Cotton Mills Co Ltd requisitioned an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) of the shareholders of Swadeshi Polytex Ltd (turnover: Rs 45 crore). Among the resolutions to be moved at the March 28 meeting is one that seeks the removal of Sitaram Jaipuria, 58, as managing director and another asking the shareholders to appoint as director Dr Rajaram Jaipuria, 50—Sitaram is the adopted son of Rajaram's father. Three other directors also face the axe if the resolutions are carried—including Sitaram's son Ashok Jaipuria.





Sitaram (left) and Rajaram: long-standing feud

Swadeshi Cotton, one of the promoters of Swadeshi Polytex nearly 15 years ago, today holds slightly over 25 per cent of the company's shares—financial institutions hold 15 per cent. Hence it is entitled to ask for an EGM. Sitaram Jaipuria, however, is frankly exasperated. "This is almost a regular exercise," he says. "All it has is harassment value. They just cannot win." At the last EGM in December 1977, Sitaram got over 75 per cent of voter support. Rajaram Jaipuria is doggedly defiant: "The affairs of the company are not being properly conducted. They are detaining income tax. They are detaining excise duties. They are holding the shareholders to ransom."

The central charge is that Swadeshi Polytex is not being run properly and Rajaram sticks to this, brushing aside the fact that the concern run by his brother has been regularly paying dividends since 1976—and registering average profits of 1.5 crore a year. As an instance of the "mismanagement" he says that a letter of intent issued to Swadeshi Polytex in November 1981 for "substantial expansion" of its capacity to produce polyester staple fibre from 6,100 tonnes to 12,200 tonnes per annum is still in limbo as far as implementation is concerned, while other producers granted letters of intent at about the same time have gone ahead.

Swadeshi Polytex's reply to this is that it was Swadeshi Cotton which caused the delay in the first place, by contesting the letter of intent applied for in 1979 before the MRTP Commission and the Company Law Board. According to a company executive, the delay caused production costs to more than double from the original estimate of Rs 16 crore. "Furthermore," says Sitaram Jaipuria, "we would like to go in now for technology which is better than the present one. And even if the other people granted letters of intent have set up their plants, none of them, except for CAFI, has gone on stream." He points to Swadeshi Cotton's own misfortunes—unintelligent management which led to its six units coming under the management of the National Textile Corporation in 1978.

One allegation that obviously cuts Sitaram to the quick concerns Ashok Jaipuria who the notice asserts was made "deputy chief executive" of Swadeshi Polytex in 1977 "by misrepresenting that he is a commerce graduate". When it was discovered that he wasn't a graduate, the notice claims, he resigned. Later, he was made a director on the board. "How can such people be made directors of the company?" asks Rajaram.

"The charge is absolutely baseless," counters Sitaram angrily. "Ashok did not resign because of what they say in their notice. He wanted to set up his own company which he has successfully started."

Such thrust-and-riposte rallies are usual for the Jaipurias. The feud is said to have begun when Swadeshi Polytex was set up in 1970. The family decided that Sitaram would look after the fledgling company while Rajaram would pilot Swadeshi Cotton. Later, as Sitaram tells it, Swadeshi Cotton made some "imprudent investments", got into trouble over loans and the resulting squabble between the brothers led to Sitaram leaving the Swadeshi Cotton board in 1975.

Swadeshi Cotton approached Swadeshi Polytex for finance—Rajaram was still a director on the board—to see it out of the red. "They feel that Swadeshi Polytex is the child," complains Sitaram, "and that it should help Swadeshi Cotton." Swadeshi Polytex was reluctant, and with the rejection of the proposals the break was not far away.

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aram ceased to be a Swadeshi Polytex rd member in 1977—"Ousted," he char- "Ceased to be a director by due process w," says Sitaram.

In the current locking of horns, Raja- has already suffered a set-back. One of resolutions seeks to remove two directors l. Kaul and P.B. Menon, on the ground they were Swadeshi Cotton nominees. wever, both contested this last fortnight, ng that on two previous occasions in and 1983 their election to the board had opposed by Swadeshi Cotton. Menon gone to the Company Law Board with omplaint. Kaul said he was thinking of g the same. Said he: "The claim is pa- ly false, a distortion of facts and a tra- y of truth."

Given the long history of the squabble, unlikely that the Ghaziabad EGM will any peace. Sitaram is confident about shing aside his brother's challenge. Raja- is more cautious and will only say "we see". Whatever the outcome, the share- ers are sure to be treated to a colourful lay of corporate tantrums.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

MARKETS

oping for More

THE STOCKBROKING fraternity has cast a cold eye on Pranab Mukherjee's latest offering and they don't rently like what they have seen. It is not he has given away—and he has given quite a handful—but what he could but did not, which seems to bother since, like Oliver, they are always g for more. There is actually a good in the budget that should enthuse the ets—the fact that no additional levies been imposed is itself a relief—but they obviously hoping for a great deal more, he finance minister has held his hand.

shares except paper and tea have lost a hough the loss could be temporary. The so far have been marginal, but this is lly always the case until the fine print in which might take anything from two to two months after which the markets d be up and going again, unless, of e, the fine print turns out to be worse expected.

As far as the shareholders are concer- the proposal that companies may hen- h pay interest on debentures and divi- on shares up to Rs 1,000 without de- on of tax at source provided the pay- is made by an account payee cheque is a us factor. The amount of paper work ed in filing the exemption certificates be seen to be believed. The proposal help small investors and some big

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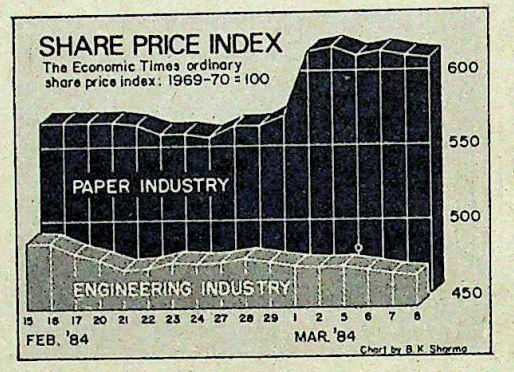
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ACTIVE STOCKS

	High 1984	Low 1984	Close 2.2.84	Change on Fortnight
Ambalal Sarabhai	14.75	11.75	13.25	0.50
Asea	53.00	48.00	51.00	1.00
Ashok Leyland	37.50	32.50	37.00	1.00
Associated Cement	381.50	343.00	357.50	(8.50)
Atlas Copco	43.00	37.50	38.00	(1.00)
Bajaj Auto	1715.00	1510.00	1560.00	(10.00)
Ballarpur	53.30	47.00	53.30	4.05
Baroda Rayon	260.00	243.00	253.00	(7.00)
BASF	49.00	41.00	41.00	(2.00)
Bata India	47.25	33.30	46.25	9.05
Bharat Commerce	20.65	16.80	19.25	2.15
Birla Jute	62.50	54.20	62.50	4.50
Blow Plast	45.00	42.50	44.00	(1.00)
Bombay Dyeing	70.00	63.50	64.00	(1.00)
Boots	57.00	45.00	48.00	nil
Britannia Industries	39.90	35.00	39.90	4.00
Brooke Bond	36.25	34.10	36.10	1.00
Century Spinning	907.50	825.00	902.50	(2.50)
Chloride India	54.00	46.25	53.00	3.75
Coates of India	28.62	26.50	28.37	(0.25)
Colgate	114.00	100.00	106.50	1.00
Cyanamid	45.50	35.00	40.00	(1.50)
DCM	76.12	56.00	57.37	(2.38)
Dunlop	27.60	26.00	26.00	(0.50)
East India Hotels	32.00	29.00	30.62	(0.63)
Elecon	44.00	39.00	43.00	3.00
Escorts	76.00	63.75	64.50	(3.25)
Food Specialities	80.00	71.00	75.00	(1.50)
Goa Carbon	25.00	19.00	21.00	(0.50)
Guest Keen Williams	22.30	21.50	21.90	0.40
Gwalior Rayon	57.75	49.00	55.75	1.00
Herdillia Chemicals	25.00	22.00	22.00	(1.00)
Hindustan Aluminium	50.05	46.85	46.85	(0.95)
Hindustan Cocoa	42.00	31.00	41.00	(1.00)
Hindustan Lever	58.50	47.75	48.75	0.25
Hindustan Motors	42.20	40.40	41.70	0.44
Indian Aluminium	24.80	19.40	19.60	0.15
Indian Cable	24.10	20.40	22.20	1.80
Indian Explosives	28.00	26.20	27.00	(0.40)
Indian Organic	34.25	31.00	32.00	0.25
Indian Oxygen	38.25	34.80	38.25	1.35
Indian Rayon	75.50	66.50	66.50	(3.00)
ITC	32.50	30.10	30.25	(0.25)
J.K. Synthetics	47.60	44.20	44.85	(0.05)
Kelvinator	94.00	90.00	91.00	(3.00)
Kesoram Cotton	61.60	53.35	59.30	0.90
Kinetic Engineering	135.00	115.00	122.00	2.00
Kirloskar Cummins	447.50	425.00	432.50	(2.50)
Kothari (Madras)	26.50	23.25	26.50	2.50
Larsen & Toubro	79.50	74.50	75.00	(1.50)
Lipton	33.80	24.50	26.20	1.40
Lohia Machines	87.00	70.00	76.50	(1.50)
Madura Coats	24.25	23.00	24.00	0.75
Mahindra & Mahindra	61.50	52.00	60.00	nil
Modi Rubber	28.00	25.75	25.75	(1.37)
Motor Industries	252.50	227.50	230.00	(2.50)
National Organic	208.25	177.50	177.50	(4.50)
Orient Paper	58.90	42.30	58.90	5.10
Otis Elevator	57.50	54.00	56.00	0.50
Ranbaxy	55.00	46.00	46.00	(1.00)
Raymond Woollen	69.50	63.00	63.50	(0.50)
Reliance	123.00	111.50	113.50	0.50
Richardson Hindustan	71.50	60.00	71.00	6.00
Sandvik Asia	680.00	610.00	660.00	12.50
Shriram Fibres	34.50	30.47	32.75	nil
Siemens	47.50	43.00	45.00	(0.25)
SPIC	32.75	29.62	30.81	0.75
Straw Products	57.00	50.00	55.00	4.00
Tata Chemicals	58.00	53.75	56.00	1.00
Tata Steel	288.00	252.00	280.50	(4.50)
Telco	428.00	395.00	428.00	10.00
Texmaco	58.40	54.30	56.00	0.40
Union Carbide	28.90	25.50	25.90	0.10
Usha Martin	22.50	20.20	20.50	0.25
Voltas	395.00	335.00	339.00	2.00
Wimco	43.50	28.50	39.00	(1.75)
20th Century	49.00	32.00	34.00	nil
Unit Trust	14.00	13.65	14.00	0.20

ones also. Unfortunately, the finance minister has withdrawn at one fell stroke all the benefits hitherto available for investment in new issues. This might affect new issues and possibly divert funds from new issues to existing companies. To that extent the share market should perk up but on balance the move may not make much of a difference in the long run.

The trouble with the excise reliefs is that



they are too small to make much of an impact either on prices or profits. It is unlikely that the reliefs will be passed on to the consumer, particularly if the prices keep on rising as some experts expect them to. However, paper and tea shares have picked up, Ballarpur having gained nearly four rupees in the bargain. Tea shares too have brightened up and the index for the plantation group has gone up by nearly 5 per cent.

What the share market has ignored in its immediate preoccupation with reliefs and concessions is that government expenditure is expected to go up by more than 10 per cent and plan expenditure by nearly 25 per cent. Too much government spending almost always leads to inflation, but inflation is a plus factor as far as the share market is concerned. Too tight a control on the state purse can work havoc in the marketplace, though not always in the share market. The impact varies from company to company and from industrial group to industrial group. Engineering companies like Larsen & Toubro, Hindustan Dorr Oliver and, up to a point, Guest Keen Williams, should do better. Others may have to wait and see until the clouds clear and the corporate sector as a whole can see itself clearly in the mirror.

Meanwhile, some companies continue to put on weight amidst rumours of bonus issues and/or other goodies. Bata, once on the sick list, was about to touch 50 last week, a gain of nearly 30 per cent in a couple of weeks. Chloride and General Electric have also looked up. Further away in Bombay, Cyanamid has been on a steady climb for the last few weeks, though other pharmaceutical shares continue to languish. These are stray cases but they do indicate which way the wind is blowing.

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

Currency & Unit			TT Selling Rates (Rs)	TT Buying Rates (Rs)
Australia	1	As $	10.1931	10.079
Austria	100	As Sch	59.5599	58.93
Bahrain	1	Dinar	30.5729	30.359
Bangladesh	100	Taka	43.4852	43.182
Canada	1	Can. $	8.6527	8.568
Denmark	1	D. Kr.	1.1434	1.130
Egypt	1	Egp. £	13.2992	13.206
France	1	Fr Frc	1.3604	1.345
Hong Kong	1	Hk $	1.3873	1.373
Indonesia	100	Rupiah	1.0948	1.087
Iran	100	Rial	12.4875	12.600
Italy	100	It Lira	0.6718	0.664
Japan	100	Jap Yen	4.7317	4.684
Kenya	1	K. shilling	0.7991	0.799
Kuwait	1	Dinar	37.2006	36.061
Malaysia	1	Ml $	4.6395	4.589
Mauritius	1	Rupee	0.8687	0.858
Nepal	1	Rupee	0.6908	0.686
Netherlands	1	D Glds	3.7141	3.661
Pakistan	1	Rupee	0.9142	0.896
Singapore	1	Sing. $	5.1001	5.043
Spain	100	Sp Pt	7.2623	7.192
Sri Lanka	1	Rupee	0.4342	0.431
Sweden	1	Sw Kr	1.3969	1.380
Switzerland	1	Sw Frc	5.0293	4.970
Tanzania	1	T. Sch	0.8831	0.878
Thailand	100	Baht	47.0450	46.638
UK	1	Pound	15.9859	15.847
USA	1	US $	10.7875	10.690
UAE	1	Dihram	2.9652	2.944
USSR	1	Rouble	14.0336	13.933
W. Germany	1	DM	4.1893	4.139

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo, Ltd., New Delhi and quoted between the banks on March 5, 1984.

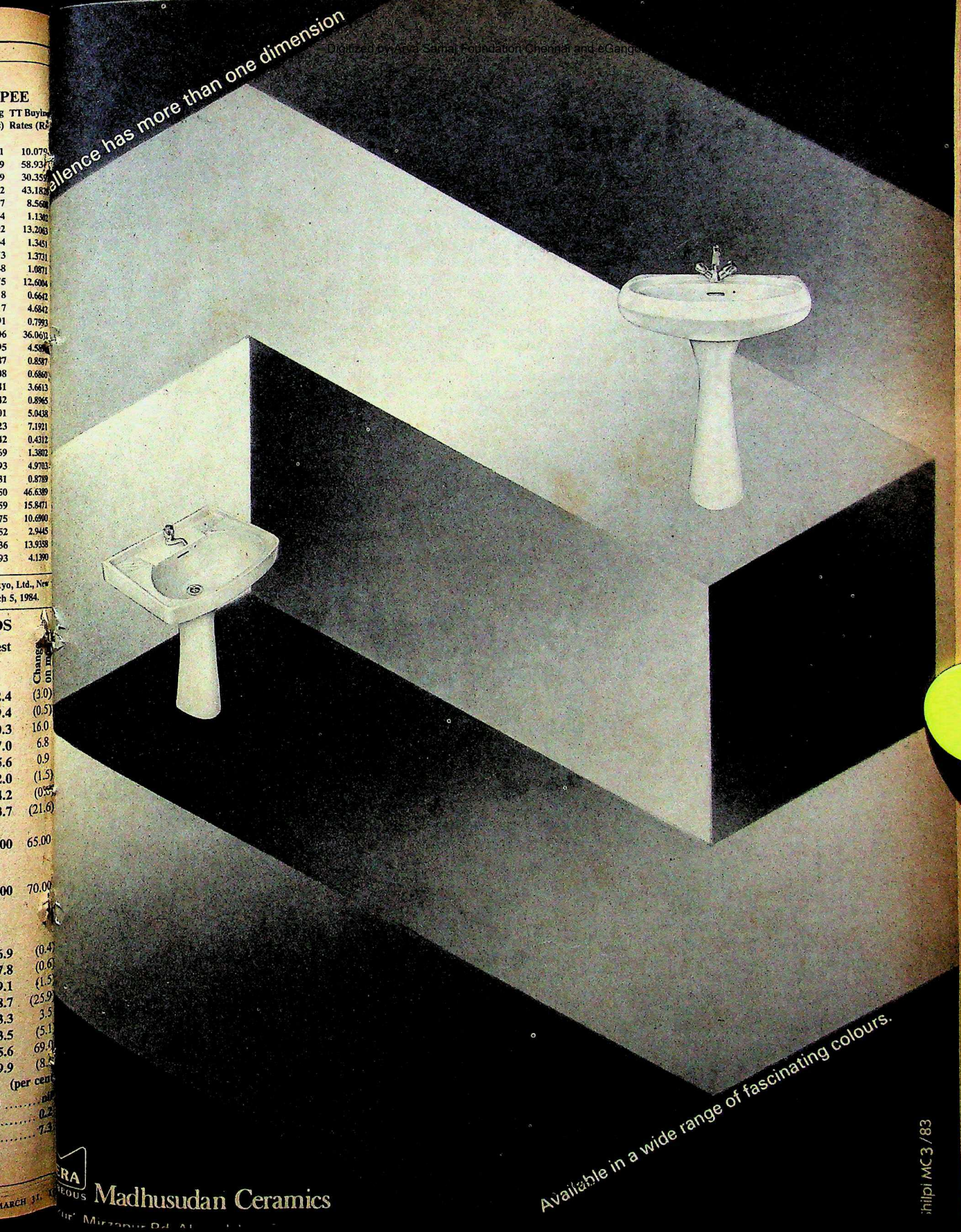
ECONOMIC TRENDS

	Latest	Change on month
PRICES		
ET Commodity Price Index*		
March 3, 1984	282.4	(3.0)
Cereals	259.4	(0.5)
Chemicals	340.3	16.0
Industrial Fibres	197.0	6.8
Metals	20375.6	0.9
Sugar	202.0	(1.5)
Textile Yarn	224.2	(0.5)
Vegetable Oils	353.7	(21.6)
Gold, standard, March 3, 1984 (Rs per 10 gm)	1,955.00	65.00
Silver, .999 March 3, 1984 (Rs per kg)	3,555.00	70.00
SHARES		
ET Share Price Index*		
March 2, 1984	276.9	(0.4)
Cement	227.8	(0.6)
Chemicals	219.1	(1.5)
Engineering	478.7	(25.9)
Fertilisers	253.3	3.5
Man-made Fibres	423.5	(5.1)
Paper	615.6	69.0
Rubber Goods	189.9	(8.2)
MONEY		(per cent)
Money Supply, February 3, 1984		nil
Bank Deposits		0.2
Foreign Exchange Assets		7.4

* 1969–70 = 100

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KARNATAKA

Burning Issue

DENSE smoke billows from a mud-packed stove in the corner of a hut on the outskirts of Bangalore. Govindamma Sudarshan, mother of seven, sits cross-legged before it, patiently waiting for the rice to cook. But the fuel is used up too quickly, and Govindamma reluctantly pushes the last few logs into the fire. Working as a maidservant fetches her Rs 200 a month, but the money goes quickly—only three days ago, she had bought 12 kg of firewood from the local depot, but it is almost gone now. By the end of the month, she will have spent Rs 50—a quarter of her income—on firewood.

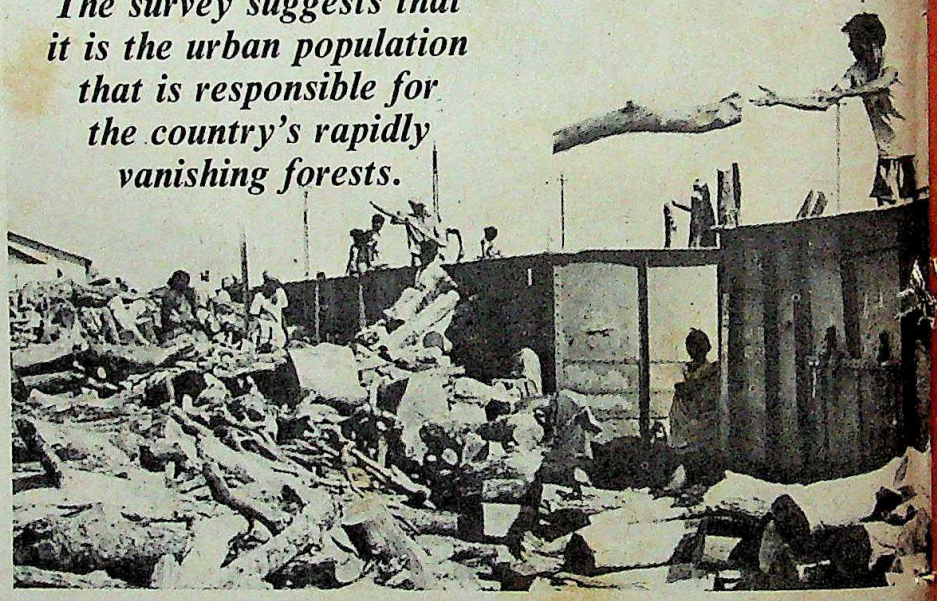
An official survey recently found that there were 2 lakh housewives like Govindamma in Bangalore, who depend on firewood for all their cooking and heating. According to the survey by the Karnataka State Council for Science and Technology (KSCST) all that adds up to a massive 1,200 tonnes of firewood consumed every day. At least 30 per cent of the city's 6 lakh households are dependent on firewood for fuel—which means that every year forests the size of the city have to be chopped down to meet their needs.

Interestingly, the survey suggests that it is the urban population that is responsible for the country's rapidly vanishing forests. The KSCST found that Karnataka's 250 cities and towns that shelter 30 per cent of the state's 3 crore population consume 22 lakh tonnes of firewood a year—entailing the cutting down of 5 per cent of the state's forests.

The state Forest Department, however, disputes this conclusion of the KSCST, arguing that it is not possible to compute the consumption by the state's 26,826 villages—villagers just enter the forest and collect as much as they want. The right to collect firewood free from the forests was invested in them even before Independence when a certain amount of forest land was set aside for the villagers. But these have been stripped bare now, and the villagers are moving deeper into the forests. The Forest Department estimates that villagers actually consume 80 lakh tonnes a year—almost four times as much as the urbanites. S.Shyam Sunder, chief conservator of forests, says: "It is the indiscriminate removal of wood from forests by villagers which causes havoc, and it is incorrect to surmise that they are not as much responsible for deforestation as urban areas are."

But the KSCST team points out that the massive urban consumption of firewood has other implications as well—for one, it has put great pressure on the transport system. According to the study, 75 per cent of the supplies come from forests more than 120 km from Bangalore—some even come from Goa, 600 km away. Most of this comes in trucks and railway wagons. Almost 18 per cent of the road transport and 8 per cent of the rail traffic is tied up in transporting firewood. And this in turn leads to a total annual consumption of 22 lakh litres of diesel—worth Rs 50 lakh—to merely transport the wood to the city. All this has shattered the myth held by Indian planners that firewood is a non-commercial energy. The KSCST says that "in the urban context, firewood is not non-commercial energy—it is as commercial a form as electricity, oil or coal".

The survey suggests that it is the urban population that is responsible for the country's rapidly vanishing forests.



Similarly, charcoal is consumed by 11 per cent of the city's households, brought in from forests as far as 250 km away. The city consumes 50,000 tonnes annually, leading to destruction of forests half the size of Bangalore. The team observes: "While charcoal is a smaller problem (than firewood), it cannot be called an insignificant or trivial problem."

The state's forests cannot sustain this continuous demand. But since nearly 90 per cent of these fuels are consumed by people who have incomes of less than Rs 200 a month, they cannot be asked to switch to costlier alternatives like kerosene or gas. And there is no way to control the supply, either, as most of the firewood and charcoal is brought in by private contractors. The only way out, as the team sees it, is to grow a green belt around the city to take care of its needs locally. The Forest Department for its part has responded to this suggestion by launching a massive afforestation program a million trees will be planted soon.

Another part of the strategy is to make stoves more efficient so that the consumption of fuel falls. The KSCST appoin team headed by R. Kumar of the I Institute of Science to design a better s According to the team, the conventiona ve—three bricks to support the vessel the fire—is only 10 per cent efficient.

Using mud and an asbestos pipe chimney, the team was able to design a b stove—it will cost Rs 90, but will be per cent fuel efficient. Kumar says: stoves do not give out smoke and are ea maintain. Moreover, these could be bu any village artisan and therefore popula throughout the state." The team bel that if these stoves are used extensivel demand for firewood in the city will significantly to half the amount.

The state Government has been e siastic: from this year, it has launched gramme to make the stoves popular districts of the state. Last month th ning programmes were held in differen of the state to teach artisans how to bui stove. Artisans in each district are in tu pected to train one more in each talu

By the end of next month, the G ment hopes to see 1 lakh such stoves in ation. Says Prahlad Rao, additional se ry, state Science and Technology D ment: "The long-term impact of intro these stoves would be tremendous. We be able to save so much wood." Bu measures, though laudable, might only to postpone the growing threat faced b state's dwindling forests. —RAJ CHENG

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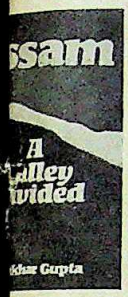
The only thing that comes close to it is leather.

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xhaustive Effort

M: A VALLEY DIVIDED
EKHAR GUPTA

Rs 125; Pages: 218



"THE ASSAMESE have innumerable complaints, some genuine, some exaggerated and some self-inflicted." Shekhar Gupta, in his first book, sets out to describe and analyse these complaints. He himself spent almost three years in the North- s a correspondent for the *Indian Ex-* and was there during the 1983 elec- So it is not surprising that he devotes st part of his book to a description of orrors of the election violence. Al- h the pages are covered with a certain nt of blood and gore, the does more than just together his reports for *xpress*. Gupta comes up ne startling figure of 7,000 in election violence, s more than double the figure and is based on n observation and asses- He also expands on the make-up of the areas the worst massacres took nd hints at what he feels oot cause of the tension entment among so many nt communities.

upta blames the British ving the seeds, although tently, of the present s. Assam had been a battleground for as it had had a history. Various tribal colonised the North-east until the e Ahoms—ancestors of the present- amese—invaded and rose to domi- The Ahoms in their turn had to fight ghul invasions and tribal uprisings. immigration began in the 16th cent- en the Ahom rulers needed help with ing their army and their kingdom. Bengali Hindus arrived when the adopted Hinduism. Internecine wars destroyed the Ahom kingdom and led ubjugation by the Burmese and ulti- by the British.

the time the British came, war had the state but different communities Assam were living peacefully side by lated from the mainstream of Indian e British opened up Assam and brought tea plantations and more immigrants, the tea-garden labourer and the 'Bengali babu'. Until then there had been little pressure on land and the population was sparse, reaping rich agricultural returns for minimal effort. The new immigrants needed food and the British found the local Assamese were happy growing enough for themselves and had no concept of 'surplus'. They concluded that the only way to boost grain production was to bring in Bengali Muslim cultivators now known as 'Mians'.

This new influx gave birth to the 'line system'. The British felt that tension was rising between the land-hungry 'Mian' and the local population, and demarcated areas for each community. Neither was allowed to own land in the other's area. These same lines form the basis of the present tribal block system and resulted in the opposite of what the British intended. The line system prevented the assimilation of the two communities and failed to keep the Muslim cultivators from getting hold of tribal land. That resentment in these areas never did die down is pointed out by the author. According to him the worst election violence occurred down the old British lines in Mangaldai and Nowgong.


BHAWAN SINGH

Election violence in Assam: recreating the horror

This is only one of the fresh ideas produced by Gupta in this book. It is also only one facet of the communal tensions in Assam. The author is at great pains to identify and explain the others as well, for example, the tension between the Boro tribespeople and the Assamese, who they regard as arrogant and overbearing. The tribals have been worst affected by the waves of immigrants. They have been pushed into remote areas by the Assamese as well as immigrant Bengalis, both Muslim and Hindu. Neither does the author spare the politician. He criticises the politicians of Assam after independence arguing that they never gave proper consideration to the problems resulting from increased immigration and encouraged it for their own short-sighted aims. To the politician immigrant votes meant block votes, and block votes meant power.

Turning to very recent history Gupta draws on his personal experience and individual research when he claims that Mrs Gandhi's Government had already decided to go ahead with elections a year before they actually took place. He quotes from a confidential document in support of his case.

These are just some of the many points that Gupta attempts to cover fully in a fairly slim volume. It is an ambitious undertaking and his sources, mainly British and Indian government records, do seem to be rather one-sided. Assamese and Bengali sources would also have been appreciated. One also feels that the book comes down on the side of the hardy Bengali immigrant, the Muslim 'Mian'. The Assamese agitators have not been allowed to say enough in their defence and the author dismisses many of their complaints as 'self-inflicted'.

The main criticism of the book is its lack of judicious editorial judgement. The reader is often confused by the way Gupta leaps back and forth between the years. He is also sometimes irritated by meaningless sentences. For example 'according to census figures while the indigenous Assamese population decreased by 7.7 per cent... the number of immigrants increased by over 15 lakhs'. How does one compare percentage with plain numbers? The welter of statistics and Assamese place names would have been a great deal easier to unravel if the publisher had been kind enough to provide a map. One of the first points Gupta makes in the book is that most people outside Assam don't know anything about it and a map is essential in unknown territory.

However, leaving this apart, it is precisely because the book is covering previously uncharted territory that it is valuable. Books have been written on Assam in recent times but they are few and far between, and none has been written since the holocaust of the 1983 elections and attempted to put the violence into perspective. The violence has been dismissed too easily as a communal conflagration. Gupta concentrates on its economic, political and historical causes. He offers no solutions but then perhaps he is not expected to. *Assam: A Valley Divided* is on the whole a welcome addition to the existing literature on this state.

—SATISH JACOB

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ZALS

ongs of Success

S SPECTACULAR success during the ast decade has few parallels in Indian nusic. The ghazal has come a long way the kothas of Lucknow and the rarefied osphere of a few aristocratic drawing-ns. Today the latest hit ghazal can be d on the street corner—from the lips of axi-driver and the college student alike. In the world of commercial music, ms such as *Mehfil* and *Meraj-e-Ghazal* mes race past the records of film -busters such as *Coolie, Betaab* and to take the number one spot in the ly top ten listings. Music India has ed a major role in ghazal promotion. Of nual turnover of Rs 3 crore, an estima-Rs 1.2 crore comes from ghazal sales. of HMV's turnover of between Rs 12 and Rs 14 crore ghazals account for t 10 per cent.

Last fortnight, when Music India orga- its annual ghazal festival, Khazana, of the concerts at Bombay, Delhi, Cal-, Madras, Bangalore and Hyderabad sold out, even at Rs 150 a night. Door-darshan continues to devote considerable time to the regular Ghazal shows 'Sham-e-ghazal' and 'Aarohi'; and their wide popularity is confirmed by the concentration of ghazals among the first-ever commercially sponsored TV programmes.

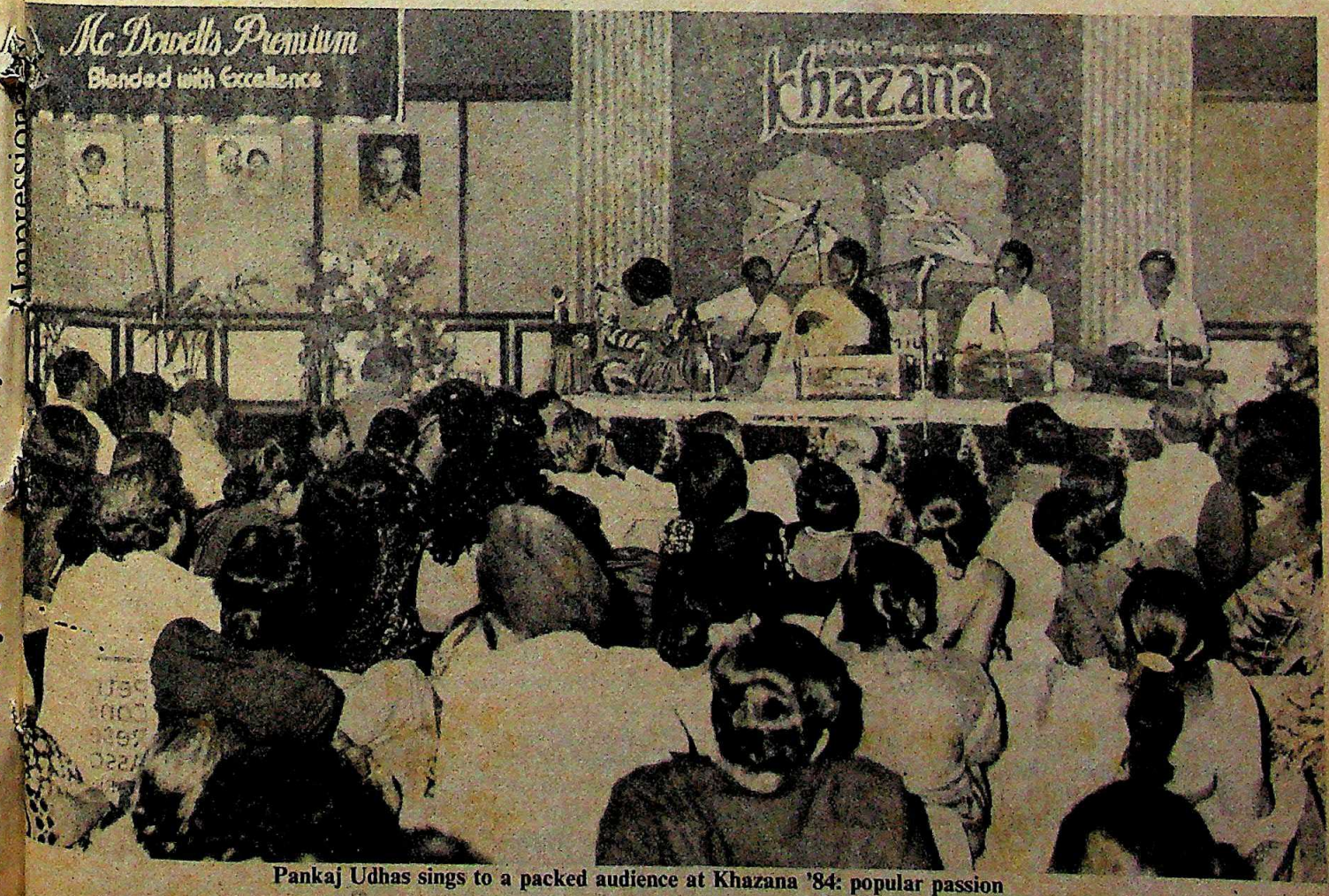
Knowledge of Urdu is no longer the cement that binds ghazal fans. "The ghazal has penetrated so deep, it's unbelievable," says Pankaj Udhas. He should know—during the last couple of months, he has performed to packed houses from Cochin in Kerala to Tinsukhia in Assam and from Renukoot in Uttar Pradesh to Imphal in Manipur.

At IIT Bombay's annual festival 'Mood Indigo' a few months ago another young ghazal artiste, Talat Aziz, found among the students the kind of enthusiasm expected at a pop concert. Twenty-one-year-old Peenaz Masani says she receives fan mail from all over the country. Recently, a schoolboy from Jabalpur wrote after seeing her on TV that, though he couldn't understand a word, he thought she was terrific.

All this is a far cry from the early '70s when India's top ghazal pair, Jagjit and Chitra Singh, had trouble filling a concert hall. They had to eke out a living by singing commercial radio jingles for a variety of products from Surf to Aspro. Speaking of their long struggle, Chitra says: "We trudged repeatedly to record companies, begging for a break. But no one was willing to take a risk." Yet, their first long-playing record *Unforgettables*, released in 1977, became a smash hit and won a Golden Disc. *Unforgettables* and the other major ghazal hit *The Best of Ghulam Ali* still command good sales.

Compared with the struggle of the Singhs and the other great ghazal couple, Nina and Rajendra Mehta, the new crop of ghazal singers has shot to stardom almost overnight. Udhas, 32, had not made up his mind till a few years ago whether to go in for academics or music after completing his M. Sc. in Botany from St Xavier's College, Bombay. But today his three records are all hits, and he is the fastest-rising ghazal star.

Anup Jalota, 30, is another who zoomed to the top bracket within two years. Though he began as a classical singer-composer specialising in bhajans, it is his ghazals that brought Jalota public acclaim. By the standards of the fast-changing ghazal world,

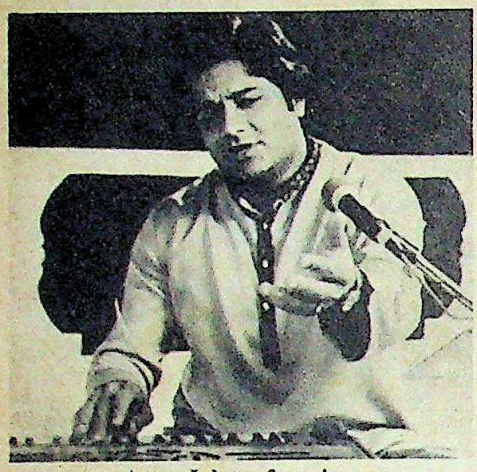


Pankaj Udhas sings to a packed audience at Khazana '84: popular passion

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—so that you can make your mark of distinction. Impression

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Anup Jalota: fast rise



Peenaz Masani: promising voice



Chitra and Jagjit Singh: pioneers



Talat Aziz: good response

27-year-old Talat Aziz is an old timer now. A jean-clad Amitabh Bachchan look-alike, Aziz created a sensation when he was first discovered by Music India in 1979.

Already, a galaxy of new faces is on the horizon—Peenaz Masani, Chandan Dass, Ahmed and Mohammed Hussain, Ratat Ali and Usha Tandon all show promise. Peenaz was just 19 when Music India talent scouts saw her singing on a TV show and offered her an exclusive contract.

The new faces are being promoted with vigour by Music India. Until he resigned last fortnight, Sanjeev Kohli, who originated the Khazana concerts three years ago, played a major role as the company's persuasive marketing director in exploring this relatively new field. He says he had realised by 1979, after the tremendous success of Ghulam Ali's visit, that there was great potential for promoting ghazals and new singers. "The market existed and just needed to be tapped," Kohli says.

Kohli, the son of music director Madan Mohan, launched a full-scale talent hunt and carefully picked and groomed the new singers for stardom. His crop of attractive, personable youngsters are a far cry from the paan-chewing *ustads* of yesteryear. As he notes: "Rapport with the audience is of vital importance. The listeners must identify and react with the singer."

The country's young singers too have realised that the ghazal is the only musical domain that is free for all, not monopolised by a cartel as is play-back music for films as well as the classical concert circuit. And since the rewards can be enormous, a number of talented amateurs are keen to try out their luck. The rates for concerts range roughly from Rs 15,000 to Rs 45,000 for established artistes. The big names can earn over Rs 5 lakh a month.

Not to be left behind, top industrialists vie with each other to get the best ghazal singers to perform at weddings and *mundans*. Chitra and Jagjit Singh are among the few who refuse to entertain at such functions for any price. Chitra says: "It has become a status symbol for big businessmen to have a ghazal night for a wedding." Meanwhile, singers like Udhas and Jalota are often asked to record ghazals for films.

To woo the market, no effort has been spared. Lyrics have been simplified, tunes made more catchy. For more difficult Urdu, the meanings are helpfully provided on the record jacket. The legendary Begum Akhtar may have been accompanied by just a sarangi and a tabla, but now some ghazal singers are accompanied by a ten-piece ing said chestra at a concert and as many as 20 the lite cians for recordings. Even instruments als are the Spanish guitar and the saxophone on, the been adopted. Says Kohli: "Our aim on me popularise ghazals so that the vacuum of gh ted by the departure of melody from eau rich music could be filled." As he sees it, ary stan ghazal boom has raised the popular t "A ghaz from the musically inferior film music. the te mon *rag*

A NUMBER of purists, though, quests variati the authenticity of much of what od of the being passed off today as ghazal has to Hasan Kamaal, a well-known poet g is to c wrote the ghazals for the movie *Nikaah*, ronical that today the ghazal has been brought ing both level of the film song. It is difficult to find of rentiate between a ghazal and a qawwali u, is pro more. cially. W

Chitra, who along with Jagjit was one zal select the pioneers in popularising the ghazal—fident ab doesn't pay to be pedantic. It's simple but is difficul ting music"—now agrees that the popiny field, risation has gone too far. Says she candience in "Anything and everything is being pain his plea off as a ghazal and unfortunately the cour Musical seems full of fools who accept it. Ghably be have now become a fashion. It is the dre the *t* thing to sing ghazals and attend ghazal patrons The result is that a lot of amateurs who music ha no business being there have become Begum fessionals and are doing very well." colou

The ultimate insult to the ghaz , who from a private recording company which her ren bid to cash in on the boom, brought s in her *Disco Ghazal Cosmic Melody*. The cass and app flopped miserably—an indication, clence re other record companies, that the public m Akh accept so much and no more of tinke ers, possi with the traditional pattern. Though

Yet, many are upset that the tinke ced film has gone too far anyway. In fact, tun as *M* often selected first and words perfunct *kali*, the fitted in. This is sacrilegious to old tials, being who point out that when the ghazal was ted into imported from Persia by the poet al record Khusro, there was no music at all. of Beg ghazal was judged entirely on the poet singers the words and the depth of the emi sale, M Ghazals are an intensely personal expr Mehmo of the poet and his master and it was The resu with Ghalib, during the reign of Bahd 70s is a Shah Zafar II, that ghazals came to be id tandard fied with particular poets. arry of t

Ghalib's treasury of immortal ghazn's then seldom tapped today, though one of his ndia in plets, "*Dil-e-nadan tujhe hua kya hai, six maj is dard ki dawa kya hai*," became a sup m and Other ghazal writers of yore such as ain him Momin and Jigar Moradabadi are also equally red. Even recent poets of outstanding l al perfo ry merit, including such all-time grea also co Firaq Gorakhpuri, are seldom used. the gha Hasan: "It is no longer important as to looked

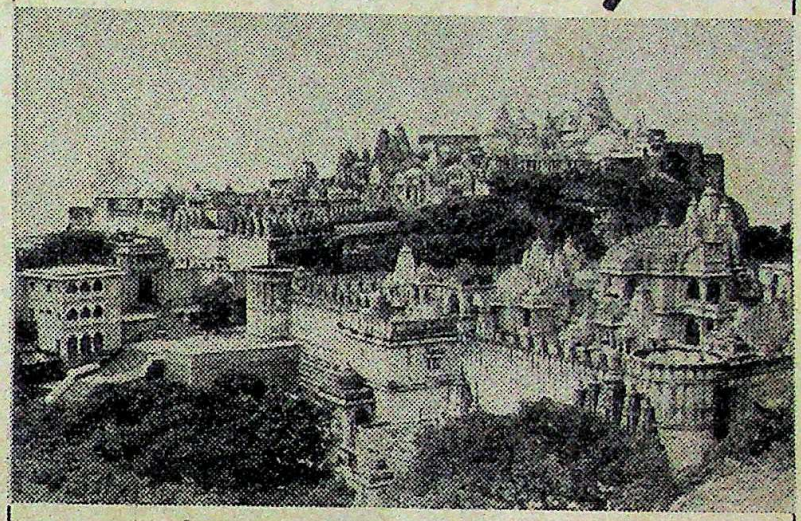
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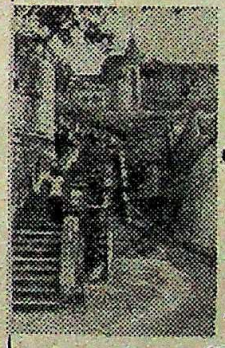
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en-piece ing said. Only how it is being said." He
as 20 y the literary standards of contemporary
uments als are abysmal. "When art becomes
phone on, there is inevitable deterioration.
aim w on means just an imitation. The new
acuum s of ghazal listeners belongs to the
y from eau riche and has no background and
sees it, ary standard," he says.
opular ta "A ghazal," says Jalota, "is much more
music. the technicality of couplets with a
mon *radeef*." Unlike a film song, which
gh, quests variation, a ghazal tries to "capture the
of whad of the moment each time." Adds Aziz:
as ghazie has to maintain standards. The basic
poet ng is to convey feeling."
Nikaa ronically, however, Udhas, a Gujarati
ought t ing both the classical musical back-
cult to d nd of Jalota and Aziz's mastery of
qawwali u, is probably the most successful com-
cially. While critics question both his
it was on zal selection and his pronunciation, he is
ghazal—fident about setting a new trend. He says:
mple but is difficult to sing the poetry of the past.
the popiny field, to survive you have to keep the
he candience in mind." Udhas generally scores
eing pain his pleasing mannerisms.
the cour Musical accompaniment of ghazals
it. Ghabably began in the kothas of Lucknow
is the dre the *tawaifs* were taught to enchant
ghazal n patrons with the magic of their ghazals.
rs who h music had its origin in classical ragas. It
ecome Begum Akhtar, a one-time courtesan
ell." colourful life in the early part of this
ghaza , who first made a name for herself
ay which her rendering of ghazals by the great
brought s in her deep, rich voice. She was recor-
The cass and appeared on radio as well, but her
tion, clence remained limited. Even today,
e public m Akhtar's records are not chart-
of tinke ers, possibly because of the chaste Urdu.
Though the form has at times in-
he tinke ced film music, even in such popular
ct, tun as *Mughal-e-Azam*, *Jahanara* and
erfunct *kali*, they were not really identified as
old tr als, being jazzed-up and completely int-
azal was ed into the film. The only non-film
poet A al records in those days, apart from
at all of Begum Akhtar, were made when
he poet singers like Lata Mangeshkar, Asha
he em sale, Mohammed Rafi, Mukesh or
l expr Mehmood found time to sing ghazals.
it was The resurgence of the ghazal in the
of Bah '70s is ascribed partly to the decline in
to be id andard of film melodies after the death
arry of the older composers. When Pa-
tal ghaz n's then ghazal king, Mehdi Hasan visi-
e of his ndia in 1978, he sang to packed houses
a hai. six major cities he visited. The elite of
e a supe m and political worlds scrambled to
ch as ain him. Ghulam Ali's visit a year later
re also equally successful. With India's own
nding li l performers like Chitra and Jagjit
ne grea also coming into their own around this
used. the ghazal craze had begun. It has
t as to looked back.

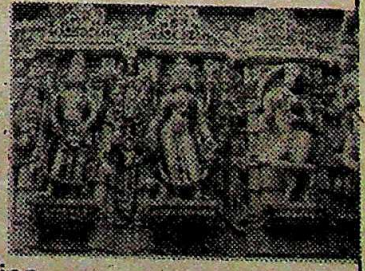
—COOMI KAPOOR

Palitana the temple city





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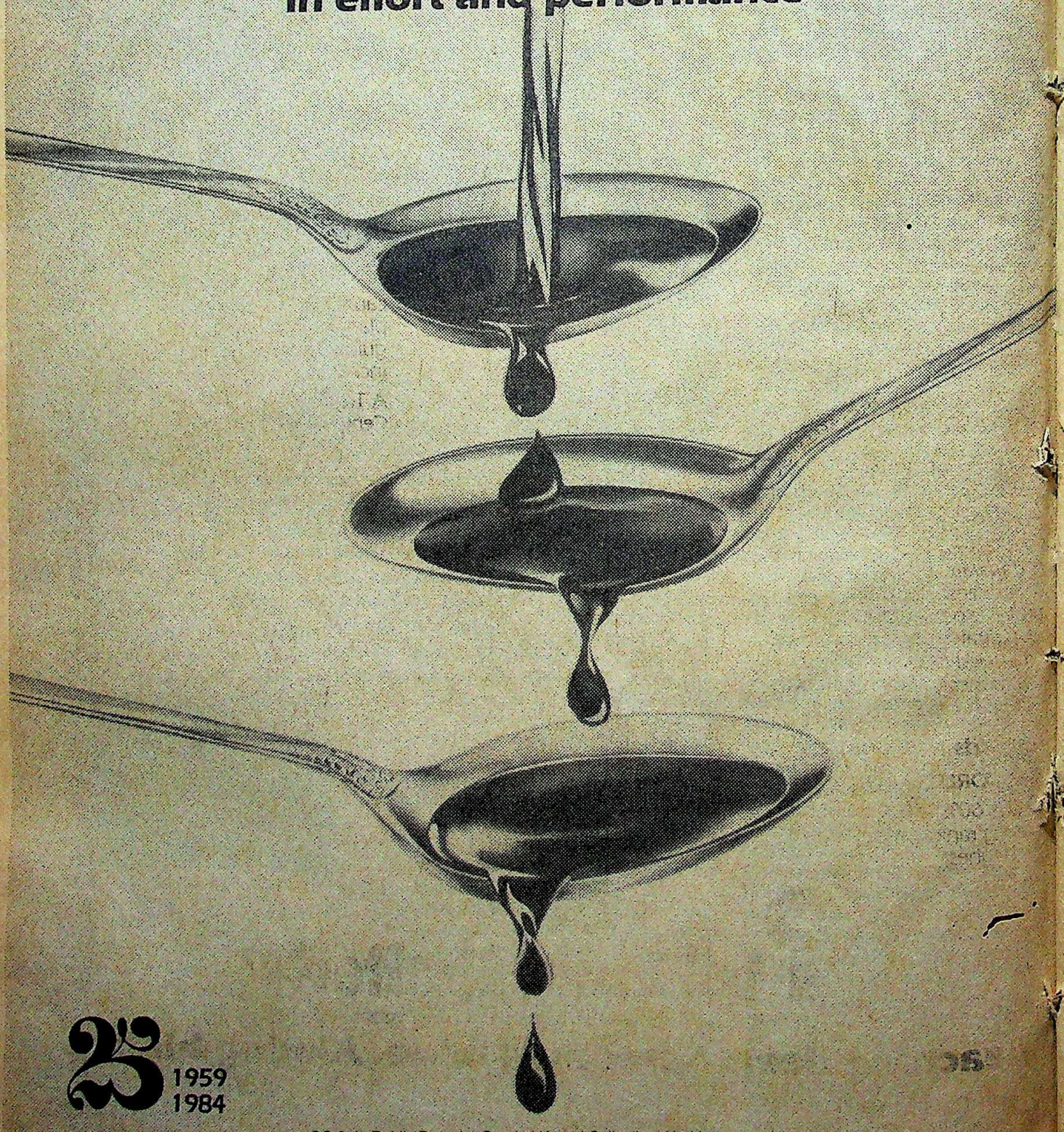
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How do we make the oil go further?

O.I.L's first 25 years : landmark achievements in effort and performance



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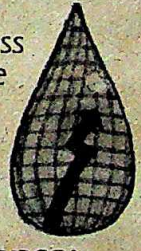
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In terms of paid-up capital, net assets, sales and maximum profit before tax, O.I.L.has the highest profitability record for 1981-82 among all Public and Private Sector companies. The gross profit as percentage of capital employed is also the highest, being 126% in 1982-83.



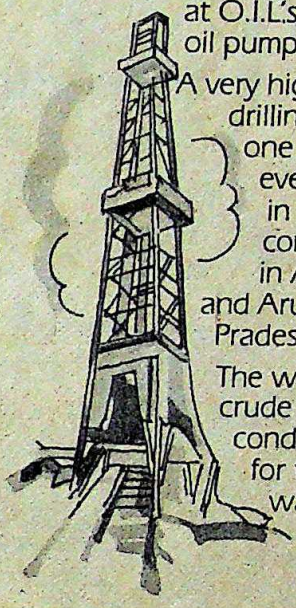
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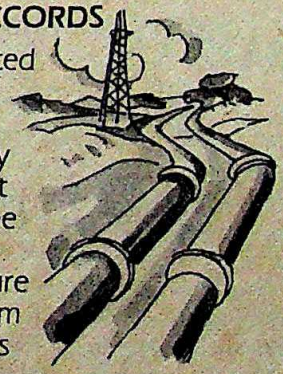


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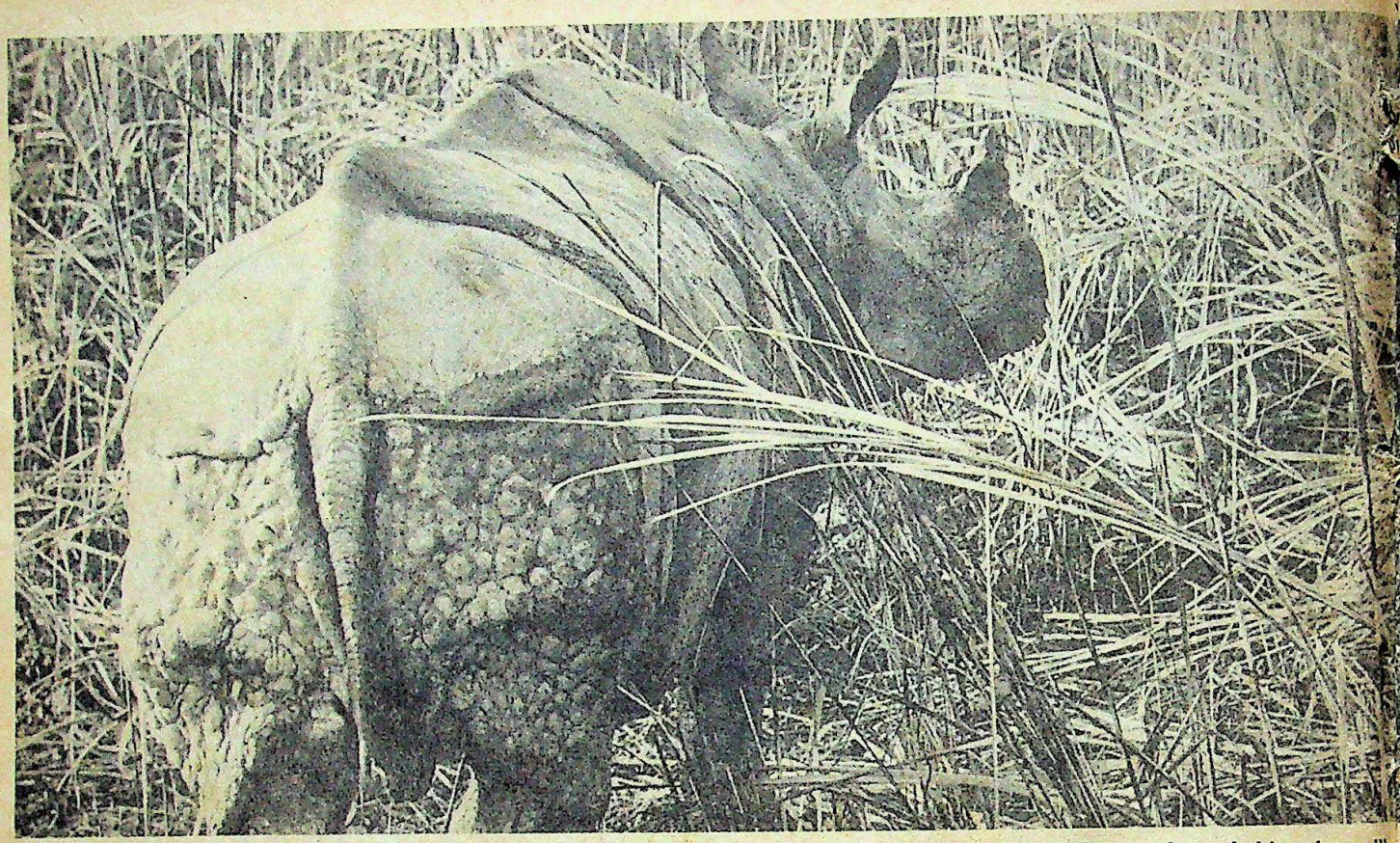
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KAZIRANGA

A greater one-horned rhino: imperille

Poachers' Preserve

IN THE moonlight, the rhino trail looks like a highway through the elephant grass. But appearances are deceptive—camouflaged with grass, a deep pit opens to swallow the ponderous herbivore. Hours later, their oars slicing into the fast-flowing Brahmaputra river, the poachers make their get-away. In the pit, the rhino stirs as life ebbs out of his huge body, the bloody slash of a *dao* marking his muzzle where he had so proudly carried his horn.

In Assam's Kaziranga National Park, the Indian rhinoceros is perilously close to extinction. Of the nearly 1,000 rhinos left in the country no less than 91 were killed by poachers last year, with 36 slain in Kaziranga alone. At least nine of them were calves. This year promises to be equally gory —already six have fallen to the poachers' knives, one of them as recently as last month. As P.C. Das, chief conservator of forests (wildlife), says: "Under the present circumstances, I think the rhino would be lucky to live for another 15 years."

The rhino's horn—really only matted hair—falsely held to be an aphrodisiac by Indians and prized for its medicinal properties by the Chinese, has made poaching a valuable business. Though poachers make only about Rs 1,000 on the deal, middlemen can hope to get around Rs 10,000 for it in Calcutta and Gauhati And although the animal is protected all over the world, there is no restriction on trading in rhino products in Singapore where one kilo of rhino horn fetches an exorbitant Rs 92,700. Even in the oil-rich Middle East, rhino horn is valued. In North Yemen, for instance, daggers made from rhino horn are worn as a status symbol.

This demand has threatened the very existence of the Indian rhinoceros, once spread right across the Indo-Gangetic plain, but now restricted to Assam and small pockets of West Bengal. About 200 more cling on for life in the Nepalese terai. Last year, poaching figures nearly trebled from around 30 in 1980, as rhino horns were hacked off to meet the ever-increasing demand in South-east Asia. The animal's natural defence is its body weight, which in some cases exceeds two tonnes—if alarmed, the short-sighted rhino will even charge a butterfly. But once trapped in a pit, he is completely helpless, and can only wait for the poacher to rid him of his misery.

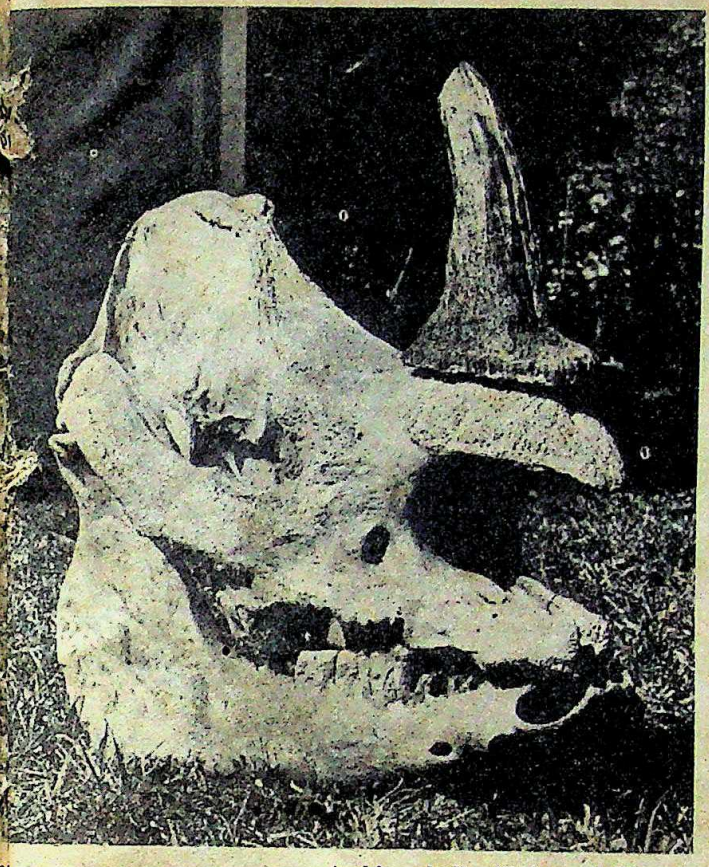
Tragically enough, no plan to stop the slaughter has been effectively implemented, precisely because there is a lack of political support. Says Das: "Wildlife in Assam is a neglected subject, and despite all policies, we have no political backing at the fie scratch vel." Last December, Deputy Minis ncers Environment, Digvijay Sinh, told th the Sabha: "The Central Government has hand—h emphasising to the state Government inly tak need for utmost vigilance in the manond M Cases of poaching detected by the state "The h chinery are reported to have been prosec there it in the courts or are under investigation." r) to Sin the facts belie Singh's confidence. nd for

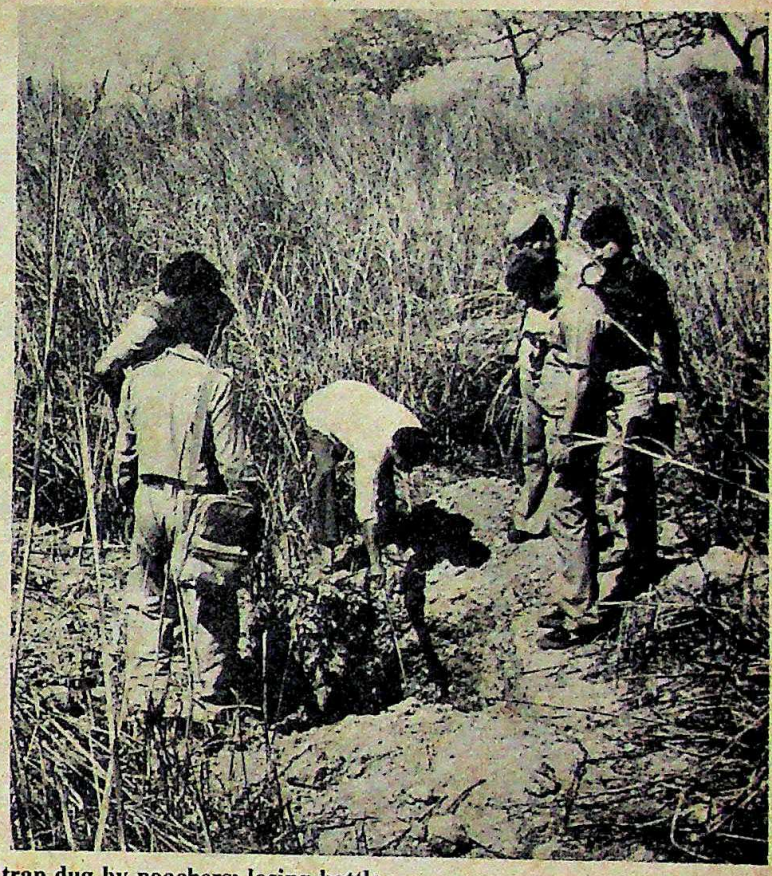
Three poachers were caught red-han of it is in Kaziranga in 1982. The rhino mana Mala scramble out of the pit, one stake half bu in its body, only to die a painful death in ATTE swamps. According to Range Officer G. le Gove kia, the poachers had been financed irtually local Congress(I) councillor, whom ter Ind Assam police refused to arrest. He was nment ted later by the Madhya Pradesh polic sprest to be eventually released for lack of p ats win cases where a poacher has been killed onically shoot-out with the forest guards, it is the guards who are arrested for murder er is big beaten up. District Commissioner V. Ob el alm says sadly: "In my three years in Barpe ed to th haven't seen a poaching conviction." the ma reason is simple, as Deb Roy, field dire ght, the of Project Tiger in Manas, explains, e appo police know we have no political ba orests, and the poachers who are arrested g o office with fines of Rs 10." overnm

But the problem itself is rather com K.K. The conf Says Das: "You eliminate the poacher,

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A rhino skull with horn (left) and a trap dug by poachers: losing battle

...scratch the surface. We've got to get to ...ncers in Calcutta and Bombay, and ...the only hope is to try and eliminate ...—how, I don't know." That will ...inly take some doing. In a letter to Das, ...ond Martin, author of *Run Rhino Run*, "The horn goes first to Calcutta and there it is sent mostly by ship (but also ...r) to Singapore...there is a considerable ...nd for Indian horn in Singapore, but ...of it is also shipped across the cause-...Malaysia."

ATTEMPTING to tighten controls, ...e Government unwittingly managed to ...rtually tie its own hands. When Prime ...ter Indira Gandhi asked the Assam ...nment to curb rhino poaching, the ...orest Department was split into two ...ate wings—forests and wildlife. This ...onically led to a clash of priorities be... the two: timber versus wildlife. ...er is big business, and wildlife authori... almost all political energy is being ...ed to the issue of timber leases which ... the massive plywood industry. Last ...ght, the conflict came out into the open ...e appointment of the chief conserva... forests. Ignoring a stay order obtained ...o officers in the running for the post, ...overnment appointed the relatively ... K.K. Barua.

...he conflict is making it all the more difficult to fight the poachers which is an increasingly uphill task. For one thing, it is impossible to effectively patrol the elephant grass-dominated terrain without elephants. In Kaziranga, only seven elephants are actually available to patrol 430 sq km of territory—the others being either ill, too young, or reserved for tourists. The department has always captured its own elephants for its use. But not any more, says Das: "Now the elephant is Schedule 1 and we cannot capture them, I have the budget for buying seven elephants, but no one is willing to sell them." Kishore Rao of the Department of Environment in New Delhi retorts: "The forest people are adamant about capturing elephants. If they aren't available in Assam, they refuse to believe they can get registered captive elephants from Bihar."

Another factor contributing to the problem is the state Government's reluctance to expand the sanctuaries, especially Kaziranga—when the floods come in July, the entire low-lying park is under water. The animals move to the higher ground to the south, where the Forest Department has no jurisdiction, even though the state Government has been paid Rs 4.71 lakh to extend the park to the high ground. Saikia, the range officer, says: "Even though we have paid for the land in 1980, it's still outside our control." And though most rhino poachers come to Kaziranga from Darrang across the river, this year six rhinos were killed by poachers coming from the southern side.

It isn't just animals who flee south during the floods. Over 2,000 families live just outside the park, and make for higher ground when the water invades—and that is for practically three months of the year. Basically poor farmers, their existence is not made any easier by the presence of wildlife so close by—rhinos, elephants and wild boar take a heavy toll of their crops. While inside the sanctuary necktied waiters wait solicitously on rich tourists, the lives of the farmers just outside are a constant struggle against nature and the elements. The temptation to make a little extra money by poaching is easy to succumb to. A local poacher who killed a rhino for a bottle of liquor confessed when caught: "At home I didn't have enough money to buy my wife a sari. If I got the horn, I would have got another Rs 400-500." Farmer Sonu Dutt adds: "People come and tell us not to poach. But for us the sanctuary is a nuisance. Half our crops are eaten up, so if someone kills a rhino, so what?"

Evidently it is this attitude of "so what" that prevails as Assam's forests are plundered and raped at will. And with so little being done about poaching, it seems very likely that when news comes of the death of the last of the Indian rhinos, it will be greeted with an indifferent "so what?"

—KUNAL VERMA in Kaziranga

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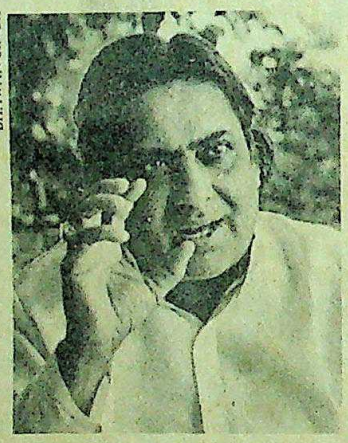
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Natasha with Suneil and Dev Anand: vanishing trick

■ The girl with the pigtails endeared herself to many, including Bombay film producers, till she flew the coop. And left with an empty cage was producer Dev Anand in whose film *Anand aur Anand* she made her debut. **Natasha Sinha**, 19, was reported missing last month amid rumours that she was a minor and her desperate parents had registered a complaint of kidnapping with the police. But all fears were laid to rest when the little nymphet came out into the open clinging to her brand-new husband's arm. "I was married in court," she said firmly, "all legal and proper, and there is no question of anybody kidnapping me. I am not a minor. All this is rubbish." The lucky man is **Dinesh Shailendra**, son of the late lyricist Shailendra. Dinesh has worked as assistant director in films for eight years and has worked with directors like Basu Chatterji, Basu Bhattacharya and Raj Tilak, and is now planning to launch his maiden directorial venture—looks like he's already got a maiden to direct.

■ The evolution of film stars into politicians seems to have lost its novelty and the reaction has already set in. And it looks like the trend is taking a strange twist. Last fortnight popular Congress(I) MP from Ajmer **Acharya Bhagwan Dev**, was getting ready for a mahurat shot for his full-length feature film *Maharishi Dayanand*, in which he plays the title role. The film tells the story of the Arya Samaj saint who preached in the mid-19th century, and hopes, according to Dev, to instill "goodwill among our people and to ask them to remove hate and contempt from our society". For good measure and commercial value Dev is throwing in a couple of songs and dances and, of course, will keep the party flag flying with "a few inspiring messages from the 20-point programme".



BHAWAN SINGH

Dev: aspiring star

■ Who are critics to stone the first cast, even if the hero happens to be the director's husband? Actress-turned-film maker **Aparna Sen** provoked a rash of raised eyebrows when, after scouring ad agencies and newspaper offices in search of the photographer-hero for her next film *Parama*, she took a close look at home and selected husband **Mukul Sharma** for the role. Sharma, 35, psychologist, week-end poet and science columnist is cast against Bombay actress Raakhee who plays an aristocratic housewife in what the Calcutta film press has already dubbed a strong feminist story. When Sen made her decision to shift from the front of the camera to its back and blitzed her way to fame with *36 Chowringhee Lane* in 1982, Sharma was baby-sitting between shifts at his own pest-control firm and answering doorbells for autograph hunters and interviewers. Now that the glare of publicity is more evenly distributed, Sharma says he's "feeling great"—without sounding at all like an MCP.



Sharma and Raakhee in *Parama*: in the limelight

SIGN POST

■ **Awarded:** The Natak Akademi awar minent musicians, da theatre personalities. the winners are Mah sad Mishra (Hindust music), Hari Prasad (instrumental music), yaraman (Carnatic m Padma Subrahmanya ratanatyam), G. Gou Sharma (Manipur ma and Kavalam Naraya kara (direction).

■ **Appointed:** Dr P gar, the new directo Bhabha Atomic Centre (BARC). Dr Iye of country's foremos scientists, was awar Padma Bhushan in 19 leading role in the 197 ran nuclear explosion

■ **Died:** Saghar Ni eminent Urdu poet dom fighter, in New D zami, a close friend of lal Nehru, was the aut veral books of poem plays and ghazals edited a number of ne and magazines.

■ **Died:** I.S. Johar, nent producer, direct and actor in Bombay, cardiac arrest. Apa having made his mar median in Hindi film acted in a few English revelled in controvers of his recent plays *B* banned by the Gover

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